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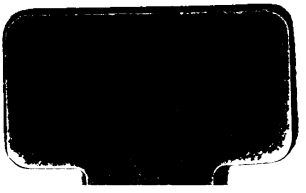
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HOLLOWHILL FARM.

HOLLOWHILL FARM.

A Novel.

BY

JOHN EDWARDSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.





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CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	CATHERINE DOYLE LOSES HER TEMPER . . .	1
II.	BENJAMIN TWIGGEM OUTWITTED	28
III.	TOUCH AND GO	54
IV.	HOW DAME DOROTHY DISCOMFITS THE REV. AMOS ACRE	79
V.	HOW DAME DOROTHY DESPISED MR. PAINTER .	105
VI.	HOW BESSY LOAFER WOULD NOT "BE SWORE AT"	127
VII.	IN WHICH THE YOUNG BARONET APPEARS . .	152
VIII.	CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF DIRGE LOAFER'S CLOCK, AND THE DINNER AT HOLLOWHILL .	180

CHAP. PAGE

IX. BILL FLUKE BRINGS THE REV. AMOS ACRE SOME SMUGGLED HANDKERCHIEFS . . . 207

X. SHOWING THAT "TWO STRINGS TO ONE'S BOW" MAY BE INCONVENIENT 233

HOLLOWHILL FARM.

CHAPTER I.

CATHERINE DOYLE LOSES HER TEMPER.

WE left Rupert Vicars standing on the cross-roads by the side of his friends the Flukes. He watched the departure of Farmer Danger's cart with a feeling of relief which found vent in a long-drawn breath, and "Thank God! she, at all events, will have rest and quiet and comfort for a time." He stood so long gazing after the retreating cart, that old Fluke began to get impatient, and as three distinct coughs produced no effect,

he ventured upon a more direct form of remonstrance. "We'd best be moving, Mister Rupert; this here's too public a place for you to stop in longer than need be."

Rupert assented to the proposition in an absent manner, and the three moved on. His companions, perceiving that he was silent and thoughtful, interfered not with his meditations, but strode rapidly forward towards Dummer, which town having reached in safety, they conducted Rupert to the house of a trustworthy friend, where we will for the present leave him.

About the hour of ten on the following morning, the Cuffs, accompanied by their two friends, Jack and Ned Nodder, plucked up sufficient courage to visit the Crow's Nest. It was, as we know, empty, and not only had the birds flown, but all signs of its having been recently occupied had also

vanished. Bill Fluke was far too sharp a fellow to leave so broad a trail as rags, cans, and billets of wood behind him; he had packed all superfluous articles into the secret hole, before adjusting the stone slab; and all that met the eyes of the new visitors were a few ashes and the scattered remnants of the bed of straw. Similar evidences of habitation had been there for years. Many a fire had been lighted, and many a straw bed arranged in the Crow's Nest long and long ere Rupert Vicars was born.

The Messieurs Nodder considered themselves both aggrieved and deluded. From their intimate knowledge of the Cuffs, they came to the conclusion that these worthy constables would never have told them a word about Colonel Dimdale and Rupert Vicars, unless they had reason to suppose that the fugitives had already flown.

The inconsistency of the Cuffs taking the trouble to go upon the bootless errand themselves, never occurred to the angry Nodders; therefore the true reason of their having been asked to accompany their friends—namely, that they were afraid to go alone—was hidden from their view.

"A nice fool's err'nd you two fellers has brought me an' Jack on!" observed Ned Nodder, as they walked down the hill towards Shingleton.

"An' a nice fool's err'nd we've bin on ourselves! How was we to know that the birds had flew, onless we looked 'em up?" retorted Bob, in an angry tone; for had he not been half, and more than half, frozen to death, and all for nothing?

"The birds flew! Why, you great idjut, there's no birds never bin there!" said Ned, more fiercely than before.

"How do you know? They wouldn't

leave their cards ahind 'em, I s'pose, if they 'ad a bin," said Bob.

"No, thick'ead—may be not; but they'd leave summut ahind 'em, if 'twar on'y a smell of smoke or the peel of a inion; there's no use for you to go on a pretendin' as any one's bin there; you mought as well own to havin' tell'd a lie an' have done wi' it."

"You're a liar yourself for sayin' so!" cried Bob, rage for the time mastering his prudence.

A blow in the face from the wrathful Ned was the answer to this incautious remark.

Bob's blood was up. Ned was a smaller man than he, so he returned the compliment.

The consequence of this second mistake was, that in about five minutes he had received a sound thrashing, to which his blackened eyes, swollen nose, and blood-

bespattered shirt bore satisfactory testimony.

The discomfited warrior having arrived at the Jolly Mariners—an appellation which, in his battered and bruised state, seemed of derisive import—called for a raw beefsteak, a bottle of brandy, and a pipe. Bob was accustomed to be beaten, and was consequently learned in the art of reducing swellings, and in preventing the discolourment of the flesh, the natural consequence of the hammering he had that morning undergone.

"Now then, Tom, you clap that 'ere steek on my face—eyes an' all—on'y you leave room for the bran'y-an'-water to goo down; cuss that Ned Nodder! 'ow 'ard 'e 'it!"

"You're allus gettin' a hidin', you are! you'll never larn to keep a civil tongue in your 'ead, you wont," remarked Tom, as he

dabbed the raw beef on his brother's face.

You are tired of this picture of low life? so am I: we will quit it; not the low life, but the disgusting part of it to which I have for a short space introduced you; nevertheless, as I have before stated, you must not expect to be introduced to many members of the aristocracy in this story.

But, if vulgar brutality and coarseness be more rife in the middle and lower ranks of life than in the higher, be sure there is a counterpoise—some homely virtue to set against the rude vice.

The equilibrium of vice and virtue throughout the different grades of society, is more correctly adjusted than we are apt to think: no particular class can claim superiority in moral ethics. There is not that difference in morality, even between St. George's and St. Giles's, which at first

sight you would deem probable. The fact is, the vices of the uneducated are of a coarse and rude description, their blasphemies and immoralities shock and disgust us; but who dare affirm that the coarse and open licentiousness of the dark alleys is more heinous in the eyes of *Him* who seeth all hearts, than the sweet silken seductions of aristocratic *salons?*

I like not to dwell on vice—whether vulgar or refined—but it is, as we all know, part and parcel of our fallen nature. It would therefore be absurd to ignore its existence; to march through the world with your hands before your face, declaring that you see nothing wrong, is simply ridiculous: your fingers are wide open, and the delicacy you assume, is false as your assertion. But we will now turn to pleasanter themes—to those *homely* virtues, simplicity, trust, and contentment, which as

surely adorn the humbler walks of life as the vices I have mentioned disfigure them.

* * * * *

At four o'clock in the afternoon of that eventful day, Dick Holder and Catherine Doyle were standing by the stile leading into the fir plantation which fringed the river near Hollowhill. The snow still lay heavy and thick upon the drooping boughs, the air was clear and frosty, and the sun was sinking to rest upon pillows of crimson and gold. But the glittering crystals and the glowing sky were alike unheeded by Dick Holder. He was looking into Catherine's large grey eyes, in which, to his imagination, were concentrated all the beauties of sky and earth. Her hand was in his, and her look was bent on his face with a half tender—half playful expression.

"Come, Kate, you might as well name

the day at wunst, like a kind good girl as you are," said Dick.

"Well, I will thin," said Catherine, snatching her hand away and laughing; "we'll be married this day year, if it's frosty and fine. Look till the sunset, Richard; did you iver see annything so grand?"

But Dick Holder was not to be put off with sunsets—let them be ever so grand—and so he told Catherine, regaining her hand at the same moment.

"Will I listen to rason? Will *you* listen to rason, Richard?"

Of course he would, he was the most reasonable of men, and in the most sensible of moods, as may well be imagined, considering that Catherine's eyes were turned full upon his, and that her fingers perceptibly tightened their pressure on his hand. Cunning Catherine! the calm,

equable state to which she had brought her lover's mind was not without a purpose, as very shortly appeared.

"You know," began Catherine, "about Colonel Dimdale an' Rupert Vicars ?"

Yes, he knew that they were "wanted," he had seen the "Hue and Cry."

Whereupon Catherine explained to him, in the first place, that Rupert was innocent of the crime laid to his charge ; and in the next that both he and the Colonel were in the neighbourhood, and were anxious to be out of it.

"It's across the wather they want to go, Richard; an' it's yourself must help them over."

"Me help them over, Kate! It's just impossible."

Catherine snatched away her hand.

"The first thing I iver asked you to do for me, is impossible," she said angrily.

"You talked of reason just now, Kate; what reason is there, think you, in askin' a man to ruin hisself?"

"Who talked of ruinin' you?" she replied, still simulating anger.

"You know well enough, that if I was catched helping them off, I should be dismissed—don't you?"

"No, I don't; I thought your duty was to seize tubs, not men."

"It's every man's dooty to aid the law, and it's clearly agin dooty to help them as has broke it."

"Oh, very well," said Catherine, her eyes now flashing with real anger; "do yer duty by all manes, an' I'll do mine." She tore a black ribbon from her neck, to which was suspended the half of a broken sixpence, and flung it to her astonished lover. "There! you've got the other half —if you haven't throwed it away—an' now

you have 'em both, an' may keep 'em both for me."

Dick Holder was very pale, for he had a temper as well as his mistress, and he felt the injustice of her passion; therefore, putting the discarded half sixpence into his pocket, he turned away in silence.

"Sence treachery seems to be your duty, you'd better go to Mr. Painter at wunst, an' tell him that the Colonel an' Rupert are surely in the neighbourhood," were Catherine's last words, as she too moved away. She had scarcely gone two hundred yards, when the sobs that had been gradually rising in her bosom, burst forth. What had she done? given back her troth —her plighted word—and her love-token that she had worn for more than twelve months, night and day? Cast away all the hopes and happiness of life at a word, and why? She could not reason—she could

not argue—she leant against a tree and cried as though her heart would break.

Dick Holder was so stung by Catherine's last remark, that he could not, at first, bring himself to think calmly on the cause of the quarrel. But good sense, and his love for her, soon prevailed over wounded dignity, and he retraced his steps in pursuit of his ireful mistress—she must have misunderstood him.

Catherine was still sobbing when she felt an arm steal round her waist, and heard the voice she loved say:—"Take your troth back, Kate, we must not part so; what have I said or done to anger you?"

Catherine clutched the sixpence tightly, and smiling through her tears, said "You wont betray them, Dick?"

"Betray them! in coorse not. What I said was as I couldn't help 'em—no more I can; but if I see either of 'em, I'll just

turn my head the other way, an' I'll not look too sharp after the *Saucy Sally* an' her owners till they're over the water. Come, will that do?"

"Oh, Dick! I'm so ashamed o' my passion; I thought you'd stop 'em an'—an' help to take 'em; an' to think that Misther Rupert, who has orways bin so good an' so kind to me an' mine, should be put in prison all along of you, may be; an' my father livin' wid Lady Jane; an' Miss Cecil an' Miss Grace, who trate me like a sister a'most, wud be destroyed wid grief; an'—oh Dick! I'm so sorry! for sure it's not in your natur' to do an onkind action, an' I ought to have knowed it."

"I wouldn't injure a hair of Rupert Vicars's head for all the law in the land. Sure him, an' me, and Bill Fluke, was all lads together, before ever his father came to be Sir Charles's agent; but I can't

igzackly *help* him out of this scrape, I'm afeard—though ef I see him an' the Colonel in a boat, I'd raythor shove them off than hawl 'em back—that I would."

Catherine placed her hand once more in his, all traces of grief were gone from her handsome countenance; tenderness had taken the place of anger in her deep grey eyes.

"That's all I iver wanted or expicted of you, Dick,—but I was so hasty, I wouldn't see the truth; I niver wished you to do anny thing might hurt yourself, but on'y jist to be blind if you come across them."

"Oh Kate, Kate! looking into them eyes of yours, is enough to blind any man. Come, kiss, an' be frins."

Catherine Doyle offered no opposition to the proposal, and the calumet of peace was apparently within easy reach of the peacemaker. Nevertheless, Dick Holder

must have found it difficult to ratify the contract—for he was a long while about it.

"There, there, Dick," said Catherine, blushing and laughing, "shure we're frins enough now, an' I must be goin'—or Dame Dorothy——"

"Bother Dame Dorothy! jist whisper the word, an' I'll let you go, Katie, my darling."

The word was whispered—the day was named—and the lovers parted.

When a boy, Rupert Vicars had passed many a happy hour at the Rookery and at Hollowhill; the Flukes and Holders were then scarcely his inferiors in position—at all events, the lads played together as equals. This companionship Rupert had never forgotten; and now, although his former friends touched their hats to him, and called him "Mister," his bearing towards them was as frank, as hearty, and

as kind as in days of yore. Not a shadow of condescension, not a tinge of pride, was visible in word or look; he was superior to such absurdity; his heart warmed towards the playmates of his youth whenever he met them; the fact of their speaking worse English than himself, made no difference in his feelings.

Do you imagine that his humble friends did not perceive and appreciate this conduct? To the full they did, of that be assured; and I rather think that if so-called "fine people" were aware that their condescending airs and patronizing manners are invariably seen through, and made subjects of mimicry and mirth by their inferiors in station, they would, for their own sakes, if for no better motive, drop so silly a custom.

The commonest, roughest piece of pottery—provided it be sound—is often of more

value than the most elaborately-painted and highly-finished china vase. You are astonished—you see no flaw in the china—everything about it appears beautiful and true. Look within. Ah! now you see a yawning crack extending through the whole length of the splendid specimen.

Dick Holder was wending his way back to Shingleton in a brown—no, in a roseate—study, for his thoughts were lingering on the lips of his love, when at a turn of the road he came full butt (excuse the vulgarity of the expression) upon another musing youth. "Hullo Dick!" "Hullo, Bill!" were the simultaneous expressions as the two men recoiled from the encounter.

"Why, whatever was you a thinkin' of, Dick, not to see where you was a steering to? You'd have run me down ef you'd bin a bit bigger; as it is, you've damaged

my figure-head considerable," said Bill Fluke, rubbing his forehead hard as he spoke.

Dick Holder laughed and rubbed too.

"It's the pot an' the kettle, Bill; you've a'most knocked my eye out; what was *you* a thinkin' of?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I was thinkin' o' you, for I wanted to see you."

"That's curious now," said Dick, "for I wanted to see you, though I wasn't a thinking' of you just then ne'ther."

"You wouldn't like to have het her as you *was* a thinking of as hard as you het me. Now would you?"

"You're right, Bill; I've just left her, an' it's all settled atween us—the day named an' all; an' you're to be best man at the weddin'—ef you will?"

"To be sure I will, Dick, an' I wish you luck—an' joy—an' 'appiness, as you're sure

to 'ave with Kate Doyle; she's the 'andsomest an' best girl in the county—I don't care where the other is."

The two young men shook hands heartily, for they were firm and fast friends, notwithstanding the antagonism of their individual occupations.

"Now, Bill, what's up?" said Dick Holder. "I shouldn't wonder as we wanted to see one another upon the same business."

His friend looked hard at him. "Kate's bin a tellin' you then, I lay a penny," he said.

Dick nodded an affirmative.

"Well, that makes matters easy; if so be Kate has spoken up for us, you'll do what we wants—not but what you'd ha' done it for me, let alone Kate."

"An' so I would, Bill, an' for Rupert Vicars, too. I ain't a goin' to turn informer, nor yet thief-catcher; that ain't my business."

"No—an' Mister Rupert ain't no thief ne'ther," said Bill, hastily.

"In course not; but ef he'd robbed the Bank of England, I wouldn't stop him, if I see him. It's likely I'd put a spoke in his wheel when he's bin the best friend ever we 'ad! Why, he pays Lady Jane the rent of our cottage, and has ever sin' my father died; it's likely I'd turn against him—very!"

"He's a trump, Dick, an' no mistake; he's allus a helpin' them as wants it; an' ef he don't deserve a helpin' 'and when he's in trouble, I'd like to know who does—that's what I'd like to know."

Bill Fluke looked fiercely round, but finding no one to contradict him, he proceeded in a quiet tone—

"Now, Dick, father an' me are bound to get him an' the Colonel out o' the country; across the water they go, or they'll be in the stone jug as sure as eggs is eggs. You jest

take the *Saucy Sally* for a herin' smack, an' me an' father for industr'ous fishermen —as we are; an' don't you make no meddle with us till we've done the trick;—will you do that Dick ?"

"I will, upon one condition; if you an'——"

"I know your condition afore you name it. Father an' me will have nothin' to do with e'ther keg or bale till this here business is over. Here's my 'and on it."

"That's it, Bill — that's my meanin' izzactly; let the contraband alone, an' I'll let you alone, and do my best to keep others off, too. I wish I could help Rupert an' the Colonel; but I can't very well do that."

"No, no, in course not, an' we don't want any more 'elp than you've promised to give us—me an' father 'll manage the rest."

The friends walked on towards Shingle-

ton. Their being seen together created no surprise, for in those primitive days the Revenue man, when off duty, would as soon drink a glass and smoke a pipe with a smuggler as with any one else. But Dick Holder was sorry that his friend had taken to that line of business—not so much on account of the unlawful nature of the calling, but because he feared a collision. They might meet on some dark night when Bill Fluke was pursuing his illicit trade, and then a struggle would be certain, and who could tell what might happen? The picture of Bill Fluke, his friend and companion from boyhood, stiff and stark, with a bullet through his brain, had haunted him of late—he had dreamt it three nights running, and it had made him very uneasy in his mind. He now told his dream to his friend. "An', Bill," he concluded, "'twas I as fired the shot—allus in each dream

'twas I as killed you. I'd give six months' pay if you'd quit the consarn. Mr. Rupert would get you a place in the Revenue, I know; you'd make a prime Revenue man, for you're as sharp again as I am—I knows that well enough; an' it's more respectable —'tis indeed."

"If by any chance you shoots me, Dick, I shall know as it's accidental, an' so I forgive you beforehand. I would sooner lose the whole cargo than harm you, as you know well; an' so if e'ther of us harms t'other, it's accident, as I say. But as to cuttin' the consarn, that's another pair o' shoes: I like my trade, an' I don't like yours, Dick."

"Well, well, you needn't turn Revenue man if it goes against you, Bill, but I do wish you'd knock off smuggling; them dreams have set me a thinking. An' then as to what you say about 'accidental,' what's the odds? if I shot you, I'd never

hold up my head again, accident or no accident."

Bill Fluke tried to laugh his friend out of "the dismals," as he called it. What signified a dream? Why *he* dreamt something or another almost every night, but he didn't mind it. "Why, Dick," he said, "'twere on'y last night as I dreamt that just as we was making the port, t'other side of the water, down went the *Saucy Sally*, right from under us; an' there was father an' me an' Mister Rupert an' the Colonel, all a strugglin' an' splashin' an' sputterin' about in the water for the dear life. But you don't s'pose as that dream would hender me from takin' of 'em over?"

"Did you ever dream the same dream three times runnin', Bill?" said Dick Holder, solemnly.

"No, I don't know as I did; but what's the odds?"

Dick shook his head, and sighed.

"'Tain't often as I'm down in the mouth about anything, as you know, but I am about these dreams; it's the three times runnin' as interropts me."

"What! you jest fresh from your mistress, as has named the day an' all! an' you talk o' bein' down in the mouth! I wish I could find as 'andsome a wench as Kate Doyle, as would have me; ef I could on'y jest light on such another it would take a deal to put me in the dismals, I know."

"You're right, Bill, I shouldn't ought to be down-hearted to-day, of all days i' th' year; but when we are at the cottage, step in an' see mother—she'll be main glad to see you."

CHAPTER II.

BENJAMIN TWIGGEM OUTWITTED.

THE following morning, whilst the family at Hollowhill was at breakfast, a messenger arrived from the Rookery with a letter for Cecil. She hastily tore open the cover; there was simply an enclosure with "J. D." in Lady Jane's handwriting upon it.

Cecil immediately left the room, and carried the letter to Colonel Dimdale; without a word she placed it before him, and retired.

We will, however, remain with the Colonel for a short time. He is bad company, I acknowledge; and "better alone

than in bad company," is, no doubt, a proverbial truism as a rule; which reminds me that "there is no rule without an exception;" and so, having matched one proverb with another, we will watch Colonel Dimdale as he reads his sister-in-law's letter.

It was short, and very much to the purpose; which, if I may venture to say so without offence, are not the usual characteristics of a lady's letter—as far, at least, as my experience teaches me. The words ran thus:—

"As soon as you are over the water, let me know where to send you a remittance. I shall settle a certain sum upon you, enough to support you in comfort. I forgive you the disgrace you have brought upon us, but *my* forgiveness is as nothing compared with the forgiveness of *God*. Jacob, it is not too late to repent and to lead a new life. I pray for you daily. I send you fifty

pounds for present necessities. Farewell.—J. D."

Jacob Dimdale's face worked rapidly with varied emotions as he read that letter; he could not but be struck with the forbearance and kindness which it evinced. "Not one word of upbraiding," he muttered —"not one word of anger; forgiveness and a remittance—that is all. No, not all, she prays for me daily; she prays for one who never prays, who dares not pray for himself. And this is the woman I have taught myself to hate, and allowed myself to ridicule and abuse for years. And why have I done so?—come, out with it, Jacob Dimdale; don't lie to yourself, at all events. Because my vanity was hurt, and my covetousness balked, by her rejection of me. And yet she was right, I knew at the time she was right, as far as her own happiness was concerned. I should have made a

wretched husband, for I had neither truth nor honesty in me, especially towards women—I never had. And yet I loved Jane Droxford, I really loved her. How beautiful she was, and how gentle and winning—fascinating is the word, in its true and simple meaning; she was the most fascinating woman I ever met, her smile the sweetest—her voice the most musical. Yes, I really loved Jane Droxford."

Colonel Dimdale sank back on his couch; he looked pale and thoughtful. Pale and thoughtful he had been of late, there was nothing extraordinary in these symptoms of distress of mind; but what is that rolling down his worn and haggard cheek?—a tear!—Jacob Dimdale shed a tear!

Even so; the soft spot—may I not say the good spot?—in his heart was touched, and the hardened, callous *roué* wept.

For years he had, as he had said, reviled

and derided his sister-in-law as "a canting hypocrite—a piece of prim propriety—of mock-modesty."

Of this constant abuse, Lady Jane was well aware, for he took no pains to conceal his sentiments—nay, he courted publicity, and never spoke of her but with derision and contempt.

And how had she repaid this wrong? By a systematic course of kindness and conciliation, which no contumely, no insult, could either check or diminish. And now, in his utmost need, fleeing from justice—a beggar—a felon—an outcast—disgraced and degraded—she, "the canting hypocrite," comes to his assistance; unasked she sends him money—unasked she sends forgiveness. She throws no stone, for full well does she know that she herself is not without sin. She utters no reproach—will not his own conscience reproach him? Her

letter breathes of that charity which never faileth.

And the sweet breath of that Gospel truth was blessed to the hardened sinner. His vain sophistries—his selfish egotism—were at once swept away, and his depraved nature, in all its hideous deformity, stood out in strong relief against that picture of Christian charity which I have so feebly described.

Never before had Jacob Dimdale seen himself in his true colours. The noxious exhalations arising from impure thoughts and a vicious course, had blinded his mental vision, a seductive but delusive mirage of the soul floated ever before him; but a breath of pure air had at length penetrated the poisonous atmosphere in which he lived; the gorgeous palaces—the pleasant groves—vanished as at the touch of an enchantress, and all was blank, dreary desolation,

a barren, trackless waste. No wonder that he, who had so long been living in a fool's paradise, was appalled at the naked truth so suddenly laid bare.

He, the libertine, the sensualist, who had set all divine and human commands at defiance; who had scoffed at religion, and derided all goodness, who had pampered every bad appetite with a recklessness and a selfish disregard for the feelings of others—without pity and without remorse, a course of conduct characteristic of his kind—how could *he* hope unaided to cross that burning desert? to reach the well-springs of living water for which his soul panted? And yet who would help him? Not the God he had mocked—not the Saviour he had derided? Yes, even so, and for the first time the light of the Gospel dawned upon Jacob Dimdale.

Mercy was mingled with justice; he was not left to despair; hope was not utterly

taken from him. The voice of conscience, once awakened, smote upon his ear in iron accents of denunciation and wrath, and he recoiled in dismay from the picture of his past life; but amid the thunder of denunciation was ever a still small voice of peace and love, and it whispered "*Repent.*" His eyes again fell on the letter which he still held—"Jacob, it is not too late to repent."

* * * * *

When Cecil returned to the parlour (for, out of compliment to her, the family meals were no longer partaken of in the kitchen) she found that a new-comer had arrived during her short absence. He was announcing his name and business as she entered the room.

"My name is Twiggem," he said, in a loud voice, "and my business is soon told. I'm a p'lice officer from Scotland Yard, and

I'm down 'ere after one Jacob Dimdale and one Rupert Vicars, and I've been told that they're likely in this 'ouse, and so I'm going to search it."

Dame Dorothy received this opening address in undisguised wrath. "You might as well have knocked afore you intruded of yourself into my best parlour—and the family at breakfast; sp'iling my carpet as cost a shilling a yard second hand, though it were as good as new. It's no odds whether you come from Scotland or Ireland, I'll not have my best carpet sp'iled by let it be who it will; so you be pleased to go outside the door and rub your boots on the mat, as a decent body would a done without telling."

The policeman frowned and stared hard at Dame Dorothy, but finding that that redoubtable woman was not in the slightest degree cowed or abashed by this awful

manifestation of surprise and displeasure, he cast a professional glance around the room; and with the observation, "Well, neither of my birds are here, I see," he retreated outside the door and cleaned his muddy boots as directed.

The moment his back was turned, Catherine Doyle took the tea-kettle from the hob. "I must fetch more water, mistress," she said, and proceeded to leave the room; but her exit was barred by Mr. Twiggem, who held the handle of the door.

"No, no, you ain't going out of this room, my girl—not if I know it," he said, sharply.

"And why not, pray?" began Dame Dorothy, jealous (as we all are) of any interference with a servant.

But Catherine took the matter into her own hand. "I'm not going out o' this room!—faith, I am so. Must the masther

and the misthress and the whole family go without their breakfast to plaze the likes o' you?"

"It wont do, my girl," said the man, standing across the doorway with his hands in his pockets; "it wont do at any price. I'm not going to let you nor nobody else out of this room till I've searched the 'ouse. Them Cuffs should be here before this, but country constables are poor creatures."

"Af you don't get out o' that an' let me pass, I'll make things unpleasant, I can tell you," replied Catherine, raising the kettle and pouring the boiling water within an inch of the man's toes.

He hopped on one side more nimbly than might have been expected from his broad, squat figure; but as Catherine attempted to pass him he laid a detaining hand on her shoulder.

The Irish girl's blood was up in an instant. "Do you want the contints of this in your face?" she said, once more raising the kettle. "I'm neither Misther Rupert nor the Colonel; you've no warrant again me, an' af you don't take your hand off this minute——"

With a coarse oath, not necessary to record, Mr. Twiggem removed his hand, and Catherine pursued her way towards the kitchen, followed by her discomfited foe, who was by no means deficient in sharpness.

But Mr. Twiggem's professional acuteness was no match for Catherine's natural intelligence. The moment they were alone her whole manner changed, her eyes no longer flashed with fury but with fun. "Come now," she said, "since you've took the trouble o' followin' me here, you might as well make yourself of use an' help me fill this kettle."

"And so I will, my girl; I'm always ready and willing to 'elp a 'andsome girl like you."

"Thank you, sir," said Catherine, with an arch look, and dropping a demure curtsey.

"Come now, what are you going to give me for 'elping you?"

"Oh, I've nothing to give that a gentleman like you would care to have," said Catherine, still more archly than before.

"Oh yes, you 'ave—yes, you 'ave." (Mr. Twiggem ventured a step nearer.) "Come now, just one kiss."

Catherine snatched away her hand, which he had taken, and ran laughing towards the door.

Mr. Twiggem intercepted her, as she intended he should; again he caught her hand, and again she escaped, still laughing and arch; a wiser man than Mr. Twiggem

might have been deceived, so well was the coquetry maintained.

And so he pursued the flying beauty, with his "Come now—just one," utterly regardless of Mrs. Twiggem and the six children. At length he pinned Catherine up in a corner, whence she could not escape but by an exercise of violence he felt certain she had no inclination to use; the prize was surely his at last!

Oh, Mr. Twiggem! Mr. Twiggem! there is many a slip between a kiss (as well as a cup) and a lip. He was still at arm's-length from the goal when a bell rang.

"Gracious!" said Catherine, sending Mr. Twiggem staggering back into the middle of the room. "There's the parlour bell and they've no wather for the tay." So saying, she snatched up the kettle and hurried away. But Catherine could not get into the parlour; the astute Twiggem

having sagaciously locked the door and put the key in his pocket; which proceeding was about as effectual in keeping people in, as the intricate machinery of Rob Roy's "sporran" was in keeping people out. The slash of a knife would open the purse irrespective of the lock; and in case of need a ground-floor room may be quitted by a window as well as a door.

Mr. Twiggem unlocked the door, shaking his head the while knowingly. "Ay, ay," he remarked, "you can't get in there; you don't s'pose I'm such a fool as to let *them* run about the 'ouse any more than *you*."

Considering the indignity of having been locked up in her own parlour, to which Dame Dorothy had been subjected, to say nothing of having the tea-kettle carried off at the very moment she was about to fill up the pot, you can readily imagine the

burst of anger which must have greeted the two culprits, Twiggem and Catherine Doyle: but imagination, like all that is beautiful, cannot be implicitly trusted, and in this instance, if she have induced you to speculate upon the excess of Dame Dorothy's fury, she has entirely misled you.

In the most cheerful tone, and with the most smiling face, she helped Mr. Twiggem to sit down and "take a dish of tea" before he set out on his "v'yage of discovery," whilst—"Well, I'm sure I thought you never would have brought the water, Kattern!" was all the rebuke that fell to her share.

This apparent contradiction to the general character and behaviour of Dame Dorothy is easily explained. When first Mr. Twiggem made his abrupt appearance and announced his name and business, Mrs. Danger was much in the position of a careless chess-player, who, intent upon his own game, has

overlooked the moves of his adversary. A visit from a London policeman had not been expected—so soon at all events—and was not prepared for. The Cuffs might come and welcome—it was easy to blind them; but a Londoner was quite a different sort of person to deal with: therefore did Mr. Twiggem's appearance excite her wrath. They were all caught in a trap, the Colonel could not be warned of his danger—the game was up—they were checkmated.

Are you a chess-player? if so, you can perfectly understand why Dame Dorothy abused Mr. Twiggem's boots. But perhaps you are not; on the contrary, you consider chess a stupid game (I once heard that term applied to it); however, we will not stop to ascertain where the stupidity lies, but merely observe that Catherine's prompt and ready wit saved the game. Whilst she was coquetting with the policeman in the

kitchen, Cecil and Grace, escaping through the window, rushed to the lumber-room, and hastily telling Colonel Dimdale of the unwelcome visitor, hurried him into a hiding-place already selected and prepared for his reception, inasmuch as a flask of wine, a bag of biscuits, and a rug to lie down on were placed there for his use.

This hiding-place was to the right of the capacious chimney, the mouth of which yawned dark and dim at the extreme end of the room; it had probably been an oven some century or two back, when, according to tradition, Hollowhill House had been upon a far grander scale than it was at the time of which I write. The only entrance to this place of concealment was by a dark aperture through which a man could with difficulty squeeze himself, but there was room enough within to stow away half a dozen men, if necessary.

As soon as the Colonel had passed through the opening, Cecil and Grace adjusted an old rusty iron boiler,—split in twenty places and covered with cobwebs,—to the mouth of the aperture, a position it might, to all appearances, have occupied for a hundred years—more or less. They then removed all traces of recent habitation from the room, and returned to the parlour just as Mr. Twiggem was (as he thought) on the point of paying himself for the trouble he had taken on Catherine's account.

Now then the tables are turned; it is Mr. Twiggem who is checkmated, and everything appears *couleur de rose* to his skilful antagonists. He might have had mud to the knees with impunity now—as far as Mrs. Danger was concerned.

It is surprising that Mr. Twiggem, who really understood his business well, and was not as a rule easily deceived, did not sus-

pect this altered behaviour—these smiling faces—these soft words—and this proffered hospitality. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes* would certainly have occurred to him had he been well up in classics, which however he was not. So he nodded a gracious acceptance of the offer of refreshment, took off his hat, smoothed his hair over his forehead, and sat down; he nevertheless kept a sharp eye on the door.

"Thank you, ma'am; I will take a cup o' tea, if *you* please, but I 'ope you wont take it amiss if I ask you not to leave this room—none of you—till me and the constables, who I see just coming through the gate, 'as searched the 'ouse, as 'tis our duty to do."

"Surely, Mr. Twitchem, surely—the house is at your service; search every hole and corner in it, and welcome," replied the obliging dame.

"Ay, ay," chimed in the farmer, who

thought it high time his voice should be heard. "Ay, ay, Mr. Tweekem, sarch away and welcome."

"My name's Twiggem, at your service, and neither Twitchem nor Tweekem," replied the police officer, in an offended tone.

"Well, well, Twiggem or Tweekem, it don't si'nify much which 'tis; but you're heartily welcome to sarch this house from cellar to roof—that's what I say."

The appearance of the Cuffs interrupted this somewhat superfluous permission to do that which Mr. Twiggem would certainly have done with or without leave.

"Go and open the door, Kattern," said Dame Dorothy, as the two constables knocked simultaneously and authoritatively for admittance.

"Shure I'm not to lave the room at all, or I'll be took pris'ner," replied Catherine,

in as dismal a tone as the hilarity within would permit.

"Yes, indeed, I'd forgot," said Mrs. Danger, opening the window. "How do you do, Robert? How are you, Thomas?" she screamed forth. "You must just let yourselves in, for we're all pris'ners, and dare not stir for our lives."

Mr. Twiggem maintained a dignified and somewhat gloomy silence during this colloquy. The semi-jocose tone in which both Catherine and Dame Dorcthy alluded to their state of durance, struck disagreeably on his ear; could they be laughing at him? Certainly a merrier set of captives could not be seen; and never had the Cuffs been welcomed so cordially to Hollowhill, where, as I believe I have before stated, they were not usually in high favour, save and except with Jane Danger, who smirked and ogled and simpered, and cast her eyes up and

cast her eyes down, with spasmodic exactitude not to be surpassed by the most highly-finished specimen of mechanical skill extant.

Cecil and Grace were composed and happy at having so successfully performed their part in the lumber-room; Catherine was "fit to kill herself whiniver she caught sight o' Mr. Twiggle's starin' face," as she confidentially informed Dick Holder afterwards; and the farmer looked jolly because the rest did.

"Now then, before going to work, you two gentlemen sit down and take a dish o' tea," said the dame.

"Thankee, Mrs.. Danger, we hain't no time for eatin' an' drinkin', not now," said Robert Cuff, in a surly tone, for the remembrance of the freezing and the beating he had undergone was still fresh, although the effects of the latter were but slightly

perceptible. "Mr. Twiggem," continued Robert, "we oughter to've bin 'ere an hour agoo, but sarcumstances purvented us; howsever, we bees now at your sarvice."

Upon the strength of this declaration, the two constables, at the request of Mr. Twiggem, retired with him into the passage, where a council of war was held; the proceedings of which were entirely orthodox, after the approved and well-authenticated custom of war councils in general: Mr. Twiggem, as senior officer, merely informed his subordinates what they were to do; that was all that passed, and the council was dismissed.

Mr. Twiggem's strategy was of the simplest, and therefore, we imagine, of the most perfect description. Thomas Cuff was ordered to keep guard over the parlour, which room no one was to quit till the

search was concluded. Robert was posted at the back-door to prevent any egress from the rear (an excellent, but rather tardy precaution); whilst Mr. Twiggem undertook the more difficult, and therefore more honourable employment of exploring the interior of the house.

"Ma'am," said this great man to Dame Dorothy, when all the preliminaries were satisfactorily arranged; "ma'am, I wish to do my dooty in a civil and becoming manner. No one can say as Benjamin Twiggem was ever unpolite to such as be'aved themselves as ladies and gentlemen should. Now my dooty is to search this 'ouse, and search it I must; but I'd scorn to do so undelicate an action as to go into a lady's sleeping apartment unbeknown to her; and so, ma'am, if you'll be pleased t' accompany me and see for yourself as I conduct this business with proper respect for the fe-

males of this 'ouse, I'll be obliged to you."

"Surely, Mr. Teachem, surely," replied the dame, rising and following the policeman.

CHAPTER III.

TOUCH AND GO.

THE coarse and unlearned Twiggem was but a humble type of the polished and intelligent detective of the present day; of the smart, smooth, insinuating gentleman who enters into conversation with a chance acquaintance with careless ease; discourses pleasantly of passing events, discusses with equal aptitude the merits of Tom Sayers and the Benicia Boy, or the prospects of the coming harvest; until suddenly placing his hand on the shoulder of his new friend, he whispers, "You are wanted about that Tring business."

Nevertheless, Benjamin Twiggem had a

sort of professional acuteness, and dogged determination which it was not easy to evade; and Mrs. Danger had not accompanied him long in his detective capacity, before a suspicion crossed her mind that the game was not so certainly her own as she had once supposed.

Mr. Twiggem, in the first instance, examined the ground-floor rooms. Like a good general he would not advance until he was satisfied there was no lurking foe in his rear. "What may this room be, ma'am?" he said, stopping before an old oaken door, black with age and dirt.

"That's the lumber-room—you'll not find much there beside dirt an' dust; but you can look in if you've a mind."

"If *you* please, ma'am," said Mr. Twiggem, drily.

It was a noticeable feature in Mr. Twiggem's behaviour during that memo-

rable search, that he never addressed a question to Mrs. Danger without fixing his eyes upon hers as she answered him. In the present instance he fancied that her eyes sought to avoid his; there was something too not quite natural in the tone of her voice—so at least it appeared to Mr. Twiggem—he therefore instantly determined to bestow a most minute examination upon this said lumber-room.

Mrs. Danger opened the door—"There, sir, you may walk in an' welcome," she said with the most perfect unconcern.

Now was the time of trial; could she struggle through this they would be safe. She felt that the policeman's eye was ever upon her; she knew that a falter in the voice—a change of colour—might betray her; but Dame Dorothy was a brave woman, and her courage rose with the occasion. Nevertheless, she was standing

on the brink of a precipice, and was nearly making a false step at the first move.

Mr. Twiggem halted on the threshold of the lumber-room; he was taking a survey of the objects immediately before him; he perceived that the broken furniture which lay scattered around was indeed, as the dame had said, covered with dust and dirt, but not entirely: there were finger-marks upon the furniture, and foot-marks on the floor.

He turned as though to go away. "Well," he said, "there ain't no use in searching that room—it's pretty much as you say, all dust and rubbish. I suppose now," he added, in a careless tone, "I suppose now, there's no one bin in there for months, p'raps for years; it looks as though the door 'adn't bin opened since it was first put up—that it does." Dame Dorothy was on the point of falling into the trap which, in

justice to Mr. Twiggem, we must acknowledge to have been very cleverly contrived. He was moving off, she had only as it seemed to confirm his expressed belief, and they were safe. The words were on her lips—words which must have betrayed the fact of concealment, for they could and would have been refuted in half a minute from their utterance. But, the policeman's eyes, as usual, followed his question, and Dame Dorothy was warned of her danger.

Ah Mr. Twiggem! you should have kept your eyes on the ground that time; had you done so, the game was your own. Little did you suspect how nearly the five hundred pounds was within your grasp.

"Lor, bless you," said the ready dame, "there's scarce a day passes that some one or other doesn't go into the lumber-room, either to put something by or to take something out. I was there myself yesterday,

and Catherine with me, looking over the old corn sacks; Mr. Danger wanted one—though what for I'm sure I don't know—and dreadful dusty we was, to be sure; here's the marks of our hands now upon this old bedpost, as plain as though we'd done it a purpose. The place is full of dust, and not fit for a Christian to go into; but you can go and rummage about in it if you have a mind, Mr. Tweekham; 'tain't that I want to hinder you from doing your dooty—not I indeed."

"Thank ye, ma'am; we'll go up stairs, if *you* please," replied the discomfited Twiggem.

What were the feelings of Colonel Dimdale, whilst Dame Dorothy and Mr. Twiggem were standing on the threshold of the lumber-room, who shall say? He not only heard every word that was uttered, but he could see the speakers distinctly through a

crevice in the wall of his cell. The few minutes during which they remained at the door of the lumber room seemed interminable; would the man search the room or not? Oh, how eagerly he watched him! Hope and fear chased each other through his mind with maddening rapidity. He saw the police officer turn to go away, and hope was in the ascendant. Twiggem's refusal to enter the room sounded like a reprieve at the foot of the gallows, and as the echo of their retreating footsteps along the stone passage died away, the wretched fugitive breathed more freely.

On leaving the lumber-room, Mrs. Danger proceeded up stairs with Mr. Twiggem;—and a most rigorous examination of every room, passage, and closet in the house, did the indefatigable police officer make.

Catherine's room was the last entered.

Mr. Twiggem soon spied out the trap door. "Where does that lead to?" he asked abruptly.

"To the roof of the house, to be sure; where else could it lead to, do you think?"

The Dame's fears being in a great measure allayed, her natural independence, both of manner and speech, returned.

"To the roof, eh? and nowhere else?" was the next question.

"Oh, I dare say it leads to somewhere else; you'd best go up and see for yourself, Mr. Tweekem; you seem so cur'ous about it."

"I mean to," said the policeman, drily. He unfastened the door which was only a little above his head in the eaves of the house, and clambered through. His eyes fell upon the ladder, and the trapdoor above. The dame's apparent irritability at his going on the roof at all, and her reluctance to give him any information as to what he

should find when he got there was, as he supposed, explained. "I've run 'em to ground I *do* believe," was the mental ejaculation of Mr. Twiggem. He soon scrambled up the ladder to the loft above, but the door was locked and he could not enter; all the more likely that he was on the right scent, he thought.

"Hullo, mistress, what's in 'ere?"

"Apples are in there, if you must know; an' now you be pleased to come down off that ladder, for I'm not a-goin' to let you go into my apple-loft, I can tell you, turning everything topsy-turvy—sp'ilin'—an' for what I know, pocketing my best golden pippins, as there is not the like in the whole country side, except it might be at the Rookery; an' they ain't any finer than mine; and so I told Mr. Mardaw yesterday was a week, who thinks no one knows anything of gardening but himself. I've no patience

with them Scotchmen; they're as full of conceit as ever they can hold. And so come down, if *you* please, off that ladder."

Mr. Twiggem laughed scornfully. "Either you 'and up the key of this door, or I burst it open, that's all about it, ma'am," was the cool rejoinder.

Hereupon a lively discussion took place; the dame persisting in her refusal to produce the key, and Mr. Twiggem growing more and more energetic in his avowed determination to have recourse to physical force—should diplomacy fail.

Mr. Twiggem being a rude and unlearned man, was unable to avail himself of the refined sophistry and courteous phraseology which distinguish our diplomatists of the present day. He talked not of "the high consideration" in which he held Dame Dorothy, or of his "deep anxiety to maintain friendly relations with her;" he simply

declared that the withholding of the key would constitute a "*casus belli*," and he confirmed this declaration by constant kicks with his heavy boot against the door of the loft.

Singular to relate, this obstinate persistence in a straightforward course of action, was crowned with complete success. The entire ignorance of diplomatic finesse, which set all the time-honoured, tape-tied rules and regulations of diplomacy at defiance, achieved a bloodless victory. Dame Dorothy handed up the coveted key, and Mr. Twiggem entered the apple-loft.

The dame laughed in her sleeve as she heard him descending the ladder, cursing his bad luck; he began to have a suspicion that he was being made a fool of, and after looking into the empty tank he re-entered the room, savage and sulky.

Dame Dorothy's good humour increased

pari passu with Mr. Twiggem's chagrin. She overpowered him with obliging offers of assistance in his search, suggested places of concealment which he had overlooked, in short over-acted her part, and again the policeman's suspicions were aroused.

How often do we damage ourselves or our cause by our volubility!

"You have not looked up the chimbleys yet, Mr. Twiggem; who knows but Rupert an' the Colonel may be 'sitting across the chimbley bar,' as the old song says?"

Mr. Twiggem scowled at her but said nothing.

Ah, Mrs. Danger, that observation may cost you dear!

A long weary time it seemed to Colonel Dimdale as he sat in his dark cell, shivering with cold and burning with fever, his ears

strained to catch the slightest sound and his benumbed hands clasped together.

"Surely that man must be gone; surely they will come to release me from this hole soon!" he muttered.

At length the sound of approaching footsteps is heard. "They are coming to take me out; the policeman must be gone, and I am safe." But scarcely are these comforting thoughts entertained, when a harsh voice dissipates them, and the Colonel sinks back with a hardly suppressed groan, transfixed with horror and despair.

Ah, that dread—that mortal dread—of capture, disgrace, misery! We talk about it, and write about it—as we do of many other things of which we know little—but who can understand the feeling save he who has experienced it?

As Colonel Dimdale listened, how he cursed the volubility of Dame Dorothy, who

was holding forth very energetically to Mr. Twiggem: was she about to betray him? He was too much alarmed to perceive her real drift.

"I know I've bin 'ere before, but I haven't searched this lumber-room and now I'm going to it," were the first words which met the Colonel's ear.

"Search away and welcome," said Dame Dorothy, but she did not say it heartily.

In another moment the policeman entered the room, followed by the dame. To her dismay, Mr. Twiggem, taking merely a cursory glance at the lumber around, made straight for the fireplace. "I'm goin' to follow your advice, ma'am, an' take a look up the chimney," he observed with a grin.

"You may look up, or get up if you like —it's all one to me—you'll find nothin' but a passel of swallows' nests, I expect," was the ready answer.

If Dame Dorothy had imperilled the Colonel's safety by her imprudent display of satisfaction at Mr. Twiggem's failure in the upper loft, she nobly redeemed her error now. Nothing could exceed her calm, cool, self-possession. The greater the danger the more promptly did her stout heart and ready wit rise to meet it. Twiggem's scrutinizing glance could learn nothing, but still he could not divest himself of the idea that one or other of the fugitives was concealed in the house. Dame Dorothy's complacency when she thought the search was over had been too exuberant; had there been nothing to conceal she would have been less demonstrative in the expression of her satisfaction at his want of success above—so at least argued the astute Twiggem. Having failed to disturb the dame's serenity of countenance by his professional stare, he gazed earnestly up the

mouth of the capacious chimney. At first all was dark, but after a short time his eyes became more accustomed to the dimness and he fancied that he could detect some object, resembling the figure of a man, high above his head. Seizing a long pole which stood in the chimney corner, he pushed it up till it reached the aforesaid object. Ha! the substance he touched was soft and seemed to recede from the pole; he gave one vigorous shove, a lumbering noise as of a heavy weight falling was heard, and the next moment Mr. Twiggem was sprawling on the hearth half smothered under a heap of soot, straw, and miscellaneous rubbish, the *débris* of many an innocent swallow's nest.

"I told you so," said Dame Dorothy, unable to restrain her laughter. "It's a mercy you didn't poke somethin' heavier down on your head, for there's loose bricks in the chimbley. Come, let me dust you a bit."

Mr. Twiggem whilst submitting to this kind attention gave vent to a volley of oaths, directed, however, not against the dame, but the dust; his restless eyes wandering around the while, to make sure that nothing but what might legitimately be used by those scientific architects the swallows in the construction of their habitations, had fallen.

Dame Dorothy's eyes were naturally directed towards the spot where a trace of the fugitive would be most likely to be found; and there, sure enough, directly under the old boiler, lay a gold pencil-case. To stoop and pick it up unperceived by Mr. Twiggem was impossible—equally so was the idea that it could escape his notice. For an instant her presence of mind deserted her, the capture of the Colonel appeared certain; to save him seemed beyond her power; when, with a sudden thought, she snatched

her handkerchief out of her capacious pocket, from whence flew spectacles, thimble, and pincushion. "Well, I declare! if I haven't got Cecil's gold pencil-case in my pocket, after all, and she looking for it high an' low," observed the dame, as she picked up the aforesaid article together with her own belongings.

Jacob Dimdale! Jacob Dimdale! that cleverly conceived and skilfully executed *ruse* saved thee, but thy perils are not yet over!

Mr. Twiggem, not being as he conceived at all interested in either Cecil or her pencil-case, paid no attention to the dame's observation, but giving the dilapidated boiler a violent push, he asked abruptly—

"What's this?"

"Why, it's the remains of an old biler, as anyone might see with half an eye; what's the use of your pulling it about so,

you'll have it on your toes in a minute. There! I said so—drat the man! he'll do himself a mischief yet: now you just be so good as to put that biler back in its place; I'm not a goin' to have the house pulled about my ears to please you nor nobody else."

Mr. Twiggem had, in truth, narrowly escaped broken shins; he had pushed and pulled the old boiler so rudely that it had fallen bodily from its insecure resting-place; and it had required considerable activity on his part to avoid it in its descent. There, however, it lay now, and there, straight before the startled policeman, gaped the mouth of the cavity which concealed the man he sought.

"Are you a goin' to help me put that biler back in its place or *are* you not, Mr. Twiggem?" said Dame Dorothy in an angry tone, as she stooped and vainly endeavoured to lift the fallen mass of iron.

Mr. Twiggem made no reply, but advancing to the hole he peered eagerly in. It was pitch dark, he could see nothing; but Colonel Dimdale, crouching in the farthest corner of the cell, could see him plain enough.

Rigid and motionless sat the Colonel—his brow clammy with the cold perspiration of deadly fear—his heart well nigh sick unto death. Had not his throat been palsied by mortal agony he must have screamed.

"What sort of a place is this? and 'ow far does it go?" asked the policeman.

"I'm sure I don't know, I never were inside of it; you'd best go in an' see for yourself if you're curous about it—only don't keep me standing here all day whilst you make up your mind."

Dame Dorothy, you deserved the Victoria Cross that moment if any one ever did.

The entrance to the cell was extremely narrow; it was as much as a stout-built man, like Twiggem, could do to pass through it. Mr. Twiggem had some difficulty in screwing his broad shoulders into the mouth of the opening, and more still in screwing them out again, which he did as speedily as possible when he found himself inconveniently jammed in between the thick walls.

"Cuss the place!"—he said savagely when he had extricated himself. "I'm not a goin' to squeege myself to death arter nobody—if I knows it; 'ere! give us 'old of that pole—I'll soon see what's in that 'ole."

With certain and speedy detection staring her in the face, as she thought, Dame Dorothy still maintained a steady front. She handed him the pole.

"If you get your head broke don't blame me—but you'll be pleased to help me put this biler in its place when you've

done amoosing yourself. What do you expect to find in there, I'd like to know?—unless it's rats or bats;—you're more liker to a great schoolboy than a p'liceman, birds-nesting about in this way—I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself. I expect you'll be for climbing the big elms an' searching the rooks' nests next;—you'll as likely find Rupert there as here, or, for that matter, the Colonel either. I'm surprised you did'nt bring your ferrits, there's a many holes about the house besides this one—and as likely to hold mortial men. Ay! poke away. I'll engage—Mercy on us! what's this?"

A furious oath from Mr. Twiggem, as he staggered back, re-echoed the dame's ejaculation.

The two stood staring at each other, whilst a dozen bats circled round their heads in diversfanciful gyrations; eventually

seeking shelter and a home upon the cob-webbed beams and mouldy walls against which they plastered themselves in form and posture more remarkable for tenacity than grace.

The whole time that Dame Dorothy had been holding forth about the absurdity of Mr. Twiggem's proceedings, that persevering gentleman had been prodding away with all his might into the dark hole before him. Twenty times the end of the pole had been within an inch of Colonel Dimdale's face; once it had actually grazed his clasped hands, once passed between his arm and his body as it struck the wall behind him;—but that Providence, which assigns to "every bullet its billet," turned it aside. The bats, thus rudely roused from their winter nap, made a diversion in his favour. Flap, flap they came against Mr. Twiggem's face till he removed that obstacle to

their egress, when out they flitted with a sudden impetuosity quite alarming to nerves already strained to the utmost tension. That it was the Colonel coming out headlong was the dame's firm impression.

"B——t the bats—they've a'most blinded me!" cried Mr. Twiggem, throwing the pole at the bird-beasts (I need scarcely say, ineffectually) as they circled above his head.

"Lor' a massy," said Dame Dorothy, "I'm sure they've give me such a turn I can scarce stand. I made sure 'twas the old gentleman in black, you know, Mr. Twickem; but come now, if you have done a bat-fowling an' a bird's-nesting we might as well go an' clean ourselves; I'm covered with the dust and dirt the bats have flapped down from the ceiling—an' as for you, you're not fit to be seen." So saying, Dame Dorothy turned to leave the room.

"Stay, madam," said Mr. Twiggem, con-

scious that in the zealous discharge of his duty he had not been quite so polite as he might have been—and whose dusty throat reminded him that a draught of ale would be acceptable—"stay, madam, while I put this b'iler up again; as I pulled it down, I'm bound to put it up."

"Never mind the biler now, Mr. Twickem, I can't stay here any longer; I'm fit to choke; I'll tell one of the men to set the b'iler up. You come and get a glass of ale, to refresh you—I'm sure you must want it."

When the door of the lumber-room closed, Colonel Dimdale was as cold and insensible as the stone floor on which he lay.



CHAPTER IV.

HOW DAME DOROTHY DISCOMFITS THE REV. AMOS ACRE.

NO sooner had Mr. Twiggem and his myrmidons fairly departed from Hollowhill, than Catherine was despatched to the lumber-room to assist Colonel Dimdale from his cold and comfortless hiding-place within the massive stone walls, to the warmth of bed and blankets of which it was judged he must be sorely in need.

"Well, Cecil, how did Ugly Bob behave? Did he recognise the young fellow from the Cliff Cottage?" asked Dame Dorothy.

"No indeed, aunt—at least I believe

not; he never spoke a word to me the whole time he was here."

Cecil smiled as she said this; and Mr. Danger added—

"He was so took up with Jane that there was no getting a word from him. I spoke to him once or twice but couldn't get an answer, so then I gave it up. Is Ugly Bob a follower of yours, Jane? the dame says I never see nothin'—so happen he's bin a follerer of yours this two year, as Dick Holder has bin of Kattern's—there's no sayin'."

"Mr. Robert Cuff is a civil-spoken young man, father, and always behaves as he should do; but whether he's a follower of mine or whether he isn't, ain't of any consequence to anybody; and I think it very rude and low to call people out of their names."

"So 'tis, Jane," said her mother, who was in high good-humour at her late victory;

"so 'tis, Jane; an', after all's said and done, Robert's hair is very much the colour of Rupert's, and I never heard any one call him Ugly Rupert, for all that."

Jane looked up with some misgivings as to the genuine character of this comparison. She encountered the dame's laughing eye, and turned very red, and her brow wore an ominous frown, for she particularly disliked her mother's pleasantries, which, however rich and unctuous they might be, had—to her taste at least—a sharpish smack in them.

The farmer, on the contrary, invariably laughed at his dame's wit, whether directed against himself or another. "Never mind, Jane," he said; "Bob Cuff's as God made him. He's drivin' a good trade at the Jolly Mariners, I'm told; an', after all, his hair ain't no redder than yourn—'twont set the house on fire, I lay."

Having delivered himself of the above consolatory remarks, the worthy man proceeded to fill his pipe; whereupon the dame told him to "take himself off, she wasn't a going to be stunk out of her own best parlour at that time of day—Cecil stayin' in the house an' all."

Cecil would have interposed.

"I tell you, I wont have it," reiterated the dame—"so you troop off with yourself, and see after your men, as has been doing nothing at all this blessed morning, but stand idling with their mouths open and their hands in their pockets, a staring at the constables. Come now, there's a good man, clear out of this."

Mr. Danger chuckled, and winked his eye at Cecil—as much as to say—"What a funny creature—did you ever see any one so pleasant?" Then rising, according to order, he left the room, merely observing

that he considered his dame's division of the house the contrary to fair.

"I wish you would let uncle Danger smoke here, aunt; I can't bear to put people out of the way," said Cecil, as soon as the door was closed.

"My dear, he may smoke here in the evening and welcome, but I wont have it in the morning; it's as much on my own account as yours. Bless my heart! if there ain't Mr. Painter and that Mr. Acre a coming in at the garden-gate this minute; and the room not tidied up, nor nothing! Where's Kattern? Whatever is she a-doing with that old Colonel all this time? Yes, yes, Jane, leave off darnin' that old flannel petticoat of yours, as isn't worth the thread nor the trouble; here, give it to me —do! (The dame thrust the aforesaid garment behind the sofa cushion.) I declare if the table ain't covered with wrist-

bands and sleeves, and the floor strewed over with bits of cotton an' what not: and here's a basketful of Mr. Danger's old shirts a staring everybody in the face. Whatever they come calling at this time of day for, *I* don't know, unless it is a purpose to put folks about, and give trouble."

At this moment the parlour door burst open, and Catherine appeared, looking hot and dusty.

"Oh, mistress, come quick, and send for a doctor—the Colonel's dyin': I've bin rubbin' him an'——" Here she stopped short, for Dame Dorothy held up her hand in a warning attitude. Catherine, in her hurry, had not perceived the entrance of two persons into the passage, one of whom now spoke.

"What Colonel are you speaking about, my girl? Not Colonel Dimdale, I hope?" he said, laughingly.

"Sure it's the cart-horse I'm spakin' of, sirr," said Catherine, readily; "an' I b'lieve 'twas after Colonel Dimdale he was christened—and he has the mad staggers upon him; will you come and see him, sirr? He's just fit to ate one—so he is."

"Ay, ay, but I'm not fit to be eaten, you see, so I'll just keep where I am, my girl. Good morning, ma'am (to Mrs. Danger). Ah, Mrs. Vicars, too! I'm heartily glad to see *you*, though I don't want to see your husband just now. Bad business that—not your wedding, I don't mean—I saw that in the papers too—but a bad job about Rupert. I should never have thought that he'd have——"

"Mr. Painter, Rupert has done no wrong; you must neither think—believe—nor say it, if you please," said Cecil, quickly.

"Well, well, I wont, then; I've known him since he was the height of my stick,

and I never knew him do a mean or a dirty action. A fine-spirited lad he always was, he ought to have been a sailor. I said at first, that I didn't believe a word about his having—his having made that mistake about the name, you know; 'twas not likely; but Mr. Acre would have it that it was all true, that the "Hue and Cry" must be right, and that those chaps in London must be right too. So I was all abroad, like a ship in a fog—I couldn't see my way into port; for I could not bring my mind to think so badly of Rupert, knowing him as I do, and have done, these twenty years."

"Thank you, Mr. Painter," said Cecil, looking proud and pleased. "I was sure you would do him justice."

"Appearances are very much against him, however, at present, and if this lady is his wife, she can scarcely be said to be

an impartial witness," remarked Mr. Acre, in a sententious and slightly sarcastic tone.

Cecil's colour heightened a little at this rude and unfeeling speech. She fixed her eyes for a moment on Mr. Acre, and a smile of contempt curled her lip—but she made no reply. It seemed as if, with that one glance, she had read the man through and through. "Conceited—shallow—dogmatical," was the language of her look.

Mr. Acre took off his spectacles and wiped them; he also wiped his low, narrow forehead, for although the morning was frosty, the reverend gentleman felt hot and uncomfortable.

Mrs. Danger, after greeting her guests, left the room with Catherine, ostensibly on hospitable thoughts intent, but in reality to see after the Colonel, whom she found half smothered beneath a huge heap of rugs and blankets, and just struggling into life. Hot

brandy-and-water taken internally, and hot flannels externally applied, soon brought him round. He was suffering chiefly from cold and fear, for which the above remedies, if used freely, are accounted by all good housewives a safe and sure specific.

No doctor was needed, which, under the Colonel's present peculiar circumstances, was decidedly in his favour.

Upon Mrs. Danger's return to the parlour, followed by Catherine carrying a tray loaded with cake and wine, she found the Revenue officer entertaining the company in general, and (as he hoped) Miss Grace Meadows in particular, with an account of the manner in which Rupert had served the Cuffs, adding that it was the best thing he had ever heard.

It was a curious and a significant fact that no one had ever a good word to say for the Shingleton constables; even their

sufferings in a good cause, in place of exciting pity, were only an occasion of mirth. Allow me to correct myself: one fair champion they already had—Jane Danger had objected to Robert Cuff being "called out of his name," and this morning another defender stood up for them.

"To think of those two tom-noddies sitting shivering on the rocks underneath the Crow's Nest all night! Whatever made the Shingleton folks appoint such a brace of blockheads as constables, puzzles me! I wish I'd come across them on their watch; Ugly Bob shaking with fear and frost, must have been a picture worth looking at—eh, Miss Grace?" laughed jolly Mr. Painter.

"I see nothing to laugh at in the situation of the constables, but a great deal to reprehend and censure in the conduct of Rupert Vicars for subjecting them to such barbarous usage," said Mr. Acre, severely.

"Pooh! nonsense, man; he was quite right; it was a capital plan, and most cleverly carried out. It was his only chance of getting the Colonel away, for although the constables found nothing in the Crow's Nest the next morning, the birds had been there for all that—take my word for it, they had."

"I am surprised, Mr. Painter, that you, a Revenue officer, should espouse the cause of law-breakers—of, in fact, forgers and embezzlers; for truth is truth, and as a minister of the Gospel I am bound to respect and adhere to it, although possibly in so doing I may offend some of the present company."

Mr. Acre avoided Cecil's eye as he spoke, but he felt that it was upon him, and a tingling sensation, very much resembling the feeling that heralds the more active operation of a mild sudorific, per-

meated through his entire cuticular organization.

"You'll excoose me, Mr. Acre," broke forth Dame Dorothy, "but I've heard say that truth is not to be spoken at all times; an' considering that Rupert Vicars's wife is in the room, it's neither handsome nor decent to speak of him as you have, even supposing he had been proved to have done what you say, as is not the case; and you have no right to judge folks and to condemn folks beforehand, as the Gospel teaches, or else I've read my Bible to little purpose."

Mr. Acre readjusted his spectacles—they took off the glare which distressed him; he rested his clasped hands on his lap, and raising his weak, stolid countenance, he thus spoke—

"I am a young man, Mrs. Danger, and as such I submit willingly to your rebuke,

but as your pastor and minister, I expect that you, in your turn, will hear me patiently (here the meek face lost somewhat of its meekness). I do not prejudge Rupert Vicars—he may be, and I trust is, innocent of the crime laid to his charge; but he is fleeing from justice; his name is in the 'Hue and Cry;' he is publicly accused of having committed a felony; and I had consequently a perfect right to speak of him as I have done. Nay, more, it is my duty to tell this lady (turning to Cecil) that even her near relationship to the accused does not justify her in defending the wrong, still less in aiding, abetting, or concealing the wrong-doer."

Mr. Acre paused, surprised at his own daring, for Cecil had been steadfastly regarding him the whole time he was speaking, and yet he quailed not.

Mrs. Danger looked at her niece with

astonishment. She knew her love for Rupert, she knew her high and haughty temper; and yet, there she sat, tapping the floor with her foot in a slow gentle cadence, regarding the calumniator of her husband with a mild expression, tinged slightly with pity, and strongly with contempt.

"Come, come now! come, come!—drop the subject, if you please; I hope I know how to respect gentlemen of your cloth; but, parson or no parson, I'll not stand by and see a lady insulted, and it *is* an insult to talk of Mrs. Vicars's husband in her presence as you have done," said honest and wrathful Mr. Painter.

Mr. Acre produced a yellow silk pocket-handkerchief, wiped his forehead once again, without, however, removing his spectacles, this time their dimness being rather advantageous than otherwise, and again addressed himself to the encounter.

"A minister of the Gospel," he said, "in the exercise of his sacred functions, must not allow his feelings to stand in the way. He must not shrink from performing his duty because it may cause pain either to himself or others. It is popularly believed that Colonel Dimdale and Rupert Vicars are concealed in this neighbourhood. The constables whom we met on our way here told us that they had just concluded a rigorous search of this house, and although they had not discovered either of the fugitives, suspicion was still directed towards Hollowhill as being the most likely place for their concealment, in consequence of the relationship or consanguinity of some of the inhabitants with one of the delinquents. This suspicion the presence of Mrs. Vicars certainly strengthens, and therefore——"

"I tell you what—I wont stand this any

longer," cried the Revenue officer, rising up in anger; but Cecil stopped him.

"Pray let him proceed, Mr. Painter," she said quietly, laying her hand on the sailor's arm and smiling as sweetly upon him as Grace herself could have done.

"Finish what you have to say, sir, if you please," she added, in a cold, calm tone to Mr. Acre.

"What I have to say is this, and I say it not only to you, but to all: I warn all present, that if they in any way aid or assist either Colonel Dimdale or Rupert Vicars—who have violated the laws of their country—in escaping, they will be liable to be proceeded against as accomplices in their crime." He stopped, and looked around him. No one spoke; this gave him courage, and he proceeded in a still firmer tone. "Mrs. Vicars," he said, suddenly facing her, "I solemnly call upon you to

declare—as it is your duty to do—where your husband is at this moment. Answer me—and answer me truly."

Cecil arose slowly. "I have put up with this person's impertinence hitherto out of respect to you, aunt," she said, with the most perfect composure; "were this my house I should have ordered him out of it long ago—not that anything, so very foolish a young man can say, can raise any other feeling than that of pity and contempt; but his folly becomes wearisome. I will, therefore, leave the room until he has taken his departure."

She moved towards the door.

"Stop, Cecil; sit you down," said her aunt. "Mr. Acre, I am sorry to say it to one as is a gentleman—let alone a parson, and ought to know better than to insult a lady as you have insulted my niece—but you will leave this house if *you* please, and that directly."

Mr. Acre began to bluster. 'He was not to be spoken to in this manner!—he, a minister of the Gospel, whose bounden duty it was to expose and correct abuses—to trample out sin and wickedness—to raise his voice against all who persisted in their evil courses. He had a right, a moral right, to penetrate even to the bed of sickness and of death, to awaken the dying sinner if possible to the awful consideration of his sin before it was too late: and was he to be told to quit the house because he had dared to speak the truth!'

Here his bluster was cut short by Dame Dorothy. "It does not signify talking," she exclaimed, "if you was a Bishop itself you shouldn't come a domineering here, I can tell you. Kattern, open the door! You walk out of this house, sir, this minute; I wont hear another word, I say. I'll not have you nor nobody else fulmigating here,

and as for 'evil courses' my courses are as good or better than your own, if half I hear of you is true."

That last shot seemed to tell more than the previous heavy broadside. Mr. Acre's cadaverous countenance flushed considerably; he seized his hat, and without a word to any one, he left the room and the house.

The dame sank into her arm-chair, and catching up the first thing that came to hand (which chanced to be the tail of one of Mr. Danger's old shirts), she fanned herself violently, but not silently.

"He'll force his way to me on my deathbed, will he, whether I will or not? I'd just like to catch him at it! I can't abide a tallow-faced man—never could; more especial when they've no whiskers, they allus seem like cheats; and this Mr. Acre he never looks one straight in the face, and

that's another fashion I can't abear. Lor a massy! what a heat and a fluster I am in to be sure."

"You always do put yourself in a passion about nothing, mother," said Jane, with a snap so sharp that the gentle Grace started as though she had been bitten.

"For my part," continued the exasperated damsel, "I think you were very rude to Mr. Acre, who had a right to speak as he did; and if Rupert is a forger, what cause has Cecil to be angry if any one calls him a forger, I should like to know?"

"You're a born fool, Jane—God forgive me for saying so; do you suppose that Mr. Acre comes here to see *you?* If he ever comes nigh you at all, it's only because Grace is t'other side of you, so you needn't be so put about at my having packed him off; he's no follower of yours—don't you think it;—and at the same time don't you never

presume to speak to me again in the impudent way you did just now. If you do, I'll box your ears soundly, old as you are."

I don't know any combination of letters capable of expressing the sound produced by a sudden and violent outburst of tearful feminine rage. "Yow wow" is perhaps the nearest approach to it; but it faintly and feebly portrays the sobs of passion which burst from the rebuked Jane as she rushed out of the room.

It was too bad of her mother to lay bare so mercilessly and clearly her daughter's real reason for objecting to the expulsion of Mr. Acre; but it must be remembered in extenuation of the dame's cruelty, that she herself had been a good deal, what she called "put about;" and moreover Jane's expostulations were not characterized either by politeness or respect. But what could have so exasperated Jane as to induce her to attack

her mother in the way she did ? The mere fact of ejecting Mr. Acre does not seem a sufficient reason for so much violence of conduct—there surely must be some other cause as yet unrevealed.

Your usual sagacity has hit the blot—there was another cause:—allow me to explain it.

Although you have never seen Mr. Acre before, Jane Danger had, frequently. She had walked with him, and talked with him, and if she imagined that he cared for her it was not entirely to be placed to vanity on her part, for the reverend gentleman certainly had paid her more attention than was at all necessary. But there was yet another reason why Jane's temper gave way in the sudden and unbecoming manner which we so painfully witnessed.

Mr. Painter, who was an old friend of the family, had been appropriated by Jane

presume to speak to me again in the impudent way you did just now. If you do, I'll box your ears soundly, old as you are."

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Danger as a lover for several years past. For this appropriation she had not the slightest warrant, Mr. Painter having never passed the bounds of friendship either in speech or deportment ; but Jane had the knack of twisting the commonest civility into a declaration of attachment, and she had even persuaded her mother that the Revenue officer was a decided "follower" of hers. Hence the dame's observation, which you have probably forgotten, "that she wondered how Mr. Painter dared show his face at Hollowhill after his conduct to Jane."

Dame Dorothy's words must not, however, be always taken in their literal meaning ; she would have been very sorry had Mr. Painter absented himself, for she had in reality a great regard for him, as had all who knew his worth and honesty.

But of late, Mr. Painter's attentions to

Grace had served to establish a suspicion entertained by all at Hollowhill, and therefore still more painfully apparent to the optical vision of Jane, who looked through the magnifying glass of jealousy.

After Mr. Acre's forced departure, and whilst Dame Dorothy was still holding forth in wrathful denunciation of his behaviour, Jane, who always accommodated herself to circumstances, re-entered the room:—'I'm not going to bite off my own nose to spite my face;—mother may scold as much as she likes, but I ain't going to let Grace have Mr. Painter all to herself, I know!'

Thus had this ill-used but enterprising damsel soliloquized in the quiet of her own chamber; and, acting upon this determination, she speedily dried her eyes, and assuming, to the best of her ability, an air of injured innocence, descended to the

parlour. Sliding into a chair by the side of Mr. Painter, who was talking to Grace, she coughed slightly, but vainly;—again she coughed considerably louder, but still without effect. At length she said, in a tender tone, "Please give me my scissors."

This simple and touching request she repeated three times, supposing the low, soft voice was not heard ; but receiving no answer to even the "third time of asking," she raised her gentle eyes (not destined to retain their soft expression long), and, to her intense disgust and deep mortification, she beheld Mr. Painter, who from the nature of his employment had of necessity turned his back upon her, holding a skein of silk for Grace to wind; and, as if that were not enough, whispering—yes, whispering to her into the bargain!

Poor man! he was desperately in love—but not with Jane Danger.

CHAPTER V.

HOW DAME DOROTHY DESPISED MR. PAINTER.

THE Reverend Amos Acre had but lately been inducted to the living of Shingleton, and although resident there scarcely six months, he had already become deservedly unpopular.

The worthy disciple of a sect which some thirty years ago was seldom heard of and not at all considered, but which since then have spread their taint over the length and breadth of the land, Mr. Acre burst upon the primitive people of Shingleton with all the explosive force of a bombshell.

The long candles, carved crosses, and tawdry altar-cloth, with which he disfigured

the communion table, might have been put up with—for the Shingletonians were an easy-going race. Moreover, they had been taught to reverence and respect their pastor, and to consider that, as a matter of course, he was right in all he did. The nasal intoning of the service, the frequent genuflexions, the white surplices of the choristers, although considered little better than buffoonery by the simple-minded congregation, might have been forgiven. Even the fifty minutes' sermon, consisting chiefly of a glowing description of those subterraneous regions which all good Christians regard with horror; and a settled conviction on the part of the preacher that the whole congregation there present would, sooner or later, be transferred thither—even this might have been overlooked, for, as Dick Holder naïvely remarked, 'the sermon might be slept through.' But there was

yet another form of annoyance introduced by the Reverend Amos Acre, which was not to be borne. He sought to establish a system of *espionage* over his parishioners—joined to an interference in their domestic concerns, and in matters of the most private nature—to which the Shingletonians were quite unaccustomed, and against which they at once rose in rebellion.

No house—no hour was free from Mr. Acre's intrusion; no circumstance, no calamity was proof against his approach; he respected neither grief nor sickness.

Hollowhill was not the only place from which he had been rudely expelled; for the Shingletonians, although an easily satisfied primitive race, were, when roused, a roughish set, as Mr. Acre had already discovered.

It may be remembered that Dame Dorothy had, when under excitement,

made use of the following remarkable expression to Mr. Acre: "And as for evil courses, my courses are as good or better than your own, if half I hear of you be true."

I feel that this accusation is of too indefinite a character to be allowed to remain in obscurity; were it not explained you might probably think the Reverend Amos worse than he is—a supposition quite unnecessary.

* * * * *

The reports to which Dame Dorothy alluded, were to the effect that Mr. Acre was, considering his "holy calling," too great an admirer and too ardent a follower of the fair sex.

This may seem paradoxical in a man of his severe and solemn deportment, who had launched many a bitter shaft, not only

against the frailties but the frivolities of woman. How could one who had described beauty as an "evanescent bauble, unworthy of pursuit," run after a pretty face? how could he, who had decried finery and inveighed against the love of dress, care for a trim figure and smart attire? I am not an Irishman, but I will answer these queries by another. How is it that a man who would lead "a forlorn hope"—or board a three-decker without a moment's hesitation—pulls his horse up at a double post and rail, and "cranes" at a brook? Such things have been, time out of mind, and when you can solve that riddle, I will explain how it was that Amos Acre railed at women and ran after them—both of which I am bound to say he did.

Rumour in this instance spoke with a true tongue—Mr. Amos Acre was, in short, a male flirt. I dislike the word particularly,

and would willingly substitute another if I knew one of the same signification, which unfortunately I do not.

Thus it was that Grace Meadows and Jane Danger had been frequently joined in their walks by Mr. Acre, and thus it came to pass that that astute gentleman threw dust in the eyes of Jane—in the shape of a few unmeaning compliments—in order to enjoy the society of Grace, whom the Reverend Amos ogled unceasingly, though unavailingly. Grace, not being versed in even the first rudiments of flirtation, was stupidly unconscious, supposing it to be his usual manner with ladies—and an exceedingly foolish manner she thought it.

These rencontres were in no wise kept secret from Mrs. Danger by her niece, although it is much to be doubted whether she would ever have been enlightened on the subject by her daughter.

"We met that tiresome Mr. Acre again to-day," was the constant complaint of Grace; to which complimentary observation Jane would add, "I don't think Mr. Acre tiresome at all; he's a very nice man, and talks like a book."

To these remarks, the dame would reply, "Well, girls, you are old enough to take care of yourselves; and have sense enough, I hope, not to believe all Mr. Acre's nonsense, who, as I hear, goes flirting about all over the parish."

But now that Mr. Acre had made himself personally obnoxious to Dame Dorothy she determined to forbid the girls walking with him at all, so very much more heinous did the delinquencies of Mr. Acre appear in the eyes of the dame since his rudeness to herself; and this increased hostility, you will I am sure agree with me, was but natural.

You have, I doubt not, frequently ex-

perienced the same increase of dislike towards an offending neighbour, though it is possible that you may have attributed the feeling to a different cause.

After the abrupt exit of Jane Danger, Mr. Painter renewed the pleasing occupation of making love to Grace with increased vigour; and truly a pleasing occupation it must have been to look into the soft blue eyes, to watch the beautiful colour coming and going on the smooth cheek, to listen to the gentle voice which sounded as sweetest music in the ears of the lover.

There was no mistaking Mr. Painter's meaning; there was not a shadow of flirtation in *his* manner; it was evidently the effect of deep and strong love, and, as such, Grace evidently understood it. You could tell that by the shrinking consciousness of her glance when it met his; by the very low tone in which she answered the simplest

question; and by the general uneasiness of her manner. But you could not tell—at all events, Mr. Painter could not—whether the discovery were a source of pain or pleasure to her.

The brave-hearted man never felt so foolish or looked so sheepish in his life, as he did by the side of that gentle girl. Many a time, indeed, had he clambered up a ship's side—as she vomited out fire and destruction, with his cutlass between his teeth—his heart as steady as his hands; but now his heart went "pit-a-pat" with a vengeance, and his strong hands absolutely trembled as he handed the scissors to Grace, which poor Jane had pleaded for in vain.

It must be a strange and wondrous power that can at a touch metamorphose the whole nature of a man—can revolutionize his character—can make the coward brave, and the bold tremble.

Hitherto, Mr. Painter might have said with Nelson, "I never knew fear;" but now he sits by the side of a fair girl, frightened out of his wits lest she should say "No" to the question he yearned to ask her.

After all that has been said and sung upon that master passion of the soul, "Love," it would be ridiculous in me to imagine that I could utter one word of novelty on the subject; and yet, somehow or other, I cannot let it alone. Love is so potent for good or for evil, so entirely mixed up with our very nature from childhood to the days of dotage, that it must ever have a place in the heart—ever be present to the imagination.

What the sun is to the material world, is love to the heart of man. Love is the sun of the soul, tinging all it touches with more than earthly radiance; lighting up into life and loveliness what erst had been a dreary waste.

In vain may cross-grained old gentlemen, and crotchety old ladies, revile or deride the master passion—"pooh-poohing" its power, ignoring its necessity, and condemning its practice. It will live and flourish when its maligners are dead and gone.

Is the gift to be condemned because it is ofttimes abused? If, through the evil propensities of an evil nature, love become lust—scorching, debasing, destroying—in place of soothing, elevating, and delighting—are we to vilify its true nature?

Though the burning rays of the eastern sun scorch you, though you pant for the cool shade and the refreshing stream, would you have a total and eternal eclipse?

Love is an integral part of creation; the most beautiful, the most blessed gift of the Creator; to elevate—as far as may be—our grovelling, earthly nature from the slough of selfishness.

Love is a sweet and subtle essence, heaven distilled; shed from above to soften, to purify, to gladden the heart of man.

* * * * *

Mrs. Danger having cooled herself, partly through the medium of fanning—partly by means of the "setting down" she had given her daughter—left the room, casting a side-glance at Mr. Painter as she passed him, and tossing her head contemptuously.

Cecil also rose and followed her aunt, unheeding a look from Grace, imploring her to remain.

I have been present at many love-makings in my time, and I have always observed that same imploring look on the part of the lady, as the company drop off one by one. I never could explain or understand it, and I cannot now. Her thoughts, wishes, and desires have been for weeks, perhaps

months, concentrated upon the fortunate individual who has gained her heart and is anxious to offer his own in exchange, but she will never give him an opportunity; she contrives never to be left alone with him. She says to herself fifty times a day, "When will he propose?" and she does her utmost to prevent him from proposing. How is this? What is it? True modesty? real bashfulness? or affectation?—I never could decide.

Mrs. Danger inclined towards the severe solution of the problem, Cecil adopted the more generous explanation, and I am fain to think that their opinions were in accordance with their respective ages.

"My dear," said the dame, the moment the door closed upon Cecil, "I never saw such fools as men are! specially when making love. If I've given him one opportunity of popping the question, I've given him twenty, and more than that; and yet

he hasn't the heart to say the word; but he'll sit and sigh, like a hen with a headache, till I could slap him. Not but what Grace is as big a ninny as he is, an' so I've told her. Why, 'twas only yesterday was a week as I left them sitting together just as they are now, and before I'd well got into the kitchen, out of the parlour bounces Grace, looking like a startled hare in a barn, and up to her room she flies like one possessed, and never so much as comes down again till Mr. Painter's gone! Why, as I told her—you'll never get married if you wont give a man time to speak. Do you expect he'll ask you out loud in the middle of dinner—before half a dozen people? I never saw such folly—never. Jane, with all her faults, has more sense than that—*she'd* never run away from a man as she thought was a goin' to propose to her—I know."

Cecil smiled. "No, I don't suppose she

would, Aunt Dorothy, and I, too, think Grace is foolish in avoiding what *must* come sooner or later; but Grace is a very nervous girl, and gets frightened whenever Mr. Painter approaches the dreaded subject."

"Nonsense about dreaded subject! I'm surprised to hear *you* talk such stuff, as ought to know a deal better. It's a subject she likes, and all girls like—as is quite natural they should—and yet, the moment the poor man touches on it, off she goes as though he'd bit her. I've no patience with such senseless conduct—why, you never acted so to Rupert, *I* know."

"Well, no, certainly I did not," said Cecil, laughing at her aunt's straightforward question. "I am blessed with strong nerves, I am happy to say; but even I was in a terrible flutter, Aunt Dorothy, I remember, when Rupert put the fatal question."

"The fatal fiddlestick!" retorted the un-

romantic dame. "You didn't flutter out of the room though, I'll be bound; and as for nerves—the very name gives me a turn. I've no patience with what you call 'nervous people,'—it's just affectation—nothing else. But I can't stand talking here all day—I must see after things, if nobody else will. Wherever is Kattern? I declare, what with Dimdales, and Tweekems, and Painters, and the rest, I scarce know whether I'm on my head or my heels."

In the meantime, how were affairs progressing in the parlour?

I could describe what happened if I thought fit. I could tell how Mr. Painter first drew his chair nearer to Grace, how she blushed and trembled at his approach; how loud his heart beat, and how low his voice sounded when he said "I love you," and how her eyes met his for an instant—and then fell beneath the ardent gaze they

encountered;—and how, gaining courage by little and little, Mr. Painter gradually possessed himself of the hand that rested idly in her lap, and, growing still more bold from success, actually passed his arm round her waist and drew her towards him; and finally, how, having passed the Rubicon, all bashfulness, hesitation, and timidity suddenly vanished, and he imprinted ——; in short, he did as you or I would have done under similar circumstances. All this I could, if I chose, circumstantially narrate; but I shall not say a word about it, because I feel that words are inadequate to describe the sensations which those two happy, thrice happy, mortals felt during the hour they were left *tête-à-tête* in that little parlour.

What is the use of dilating upon the cause if you have not the ability to describe the effect? But although I cannot narrate each separate effect as it arose under the

sweet and subtle influence of first love, I can tell you what was the grand effect of that hour's *tête-à-tête*—namely, the sudden appearance of Grace in Cecil's room with a glowing face, quivering lips, and swimming eyes.

"Dearest Grace," said her sister, kissing her tenderly, "I am so glad. I like Mr. Painter very much, and I am certain you will be as happy as a queen. There! you need not blush and hide your face any longer;—*he* is not here now," she laughingly added.

Grace raised her head and laughed too; she threw her arms round Cecil's neck, and hiding her face once more upon her shoulder, told her all she wanted to know.

We will leave the sisters to themselves, as best consulting their wishes, and descend to the parlour.

There we see Mr. Painter shaking every

one by the hand,—first Dame Dorothy,—then Catherine—next the farmer (who had just come in—for it was twelve o'clock)—and, finally, Jane herself.

Jane Danger would willingly have boxed the happy man's ears had she dared to do so, but she contented herself with a less demonstrative form of disapprobation comprised in a sour look, a sulky silence, and an unreciprocating palm.

These signs of dissatisfaction were however entirely thrown away upon Mr. Painter, who was in the seventh heaven of delight, and would have declared, had he been asked the question, that Jane Danger's congratulations had been everything he could have wished. He did not even remark that Jane scarcely answered him when he spoke to her, or that she invariably contradicted every word uttered by Grace during dinner.

But Catherine perceived these indications

of wrath, and could not repress her desire to laugh, which ill-timed merriment caused Jane to assume a still more dignified deportment; dignified, that is, in her own estimation, but not, apparently, in that of her poor, ignorant father, who called out between his mouthsful and his mirth—"Why, Jane, how dull you are, to be sure! One would think you was at a burial, in place of a betrothal. Come, cheer up, lass! it'll be your turn next, may be—there's no saying."

Mr. Danger's attempts at soothing his daughter were seldom successful. If things were going wrong with her, his endeavours to put them right usually made them worse. So it was in the present instance.

"I wish you wouldn't talk such nonsense, father. I'm not like some people, always trying to catch some other people; if I was, 'my turn,' as you call it, would have

come long ago; but I'm above such meanness."

This indefinite accusation passed unheeded; indeed, few heard it; certainly not Mr. Danger, who was on his legs proposing the health of "the bride and bridegroom."

This little mistake brought fresh blushes into Grace's cheek, and caused Catherine's clear, ringing laugh to resound once again.

"Lor a massy, Mr. Danger, whatever are you a thinking of? I never saw anyone so oblivous as you are in all my life," cried the dame. "Never mind him, Grace," she continued, "he was allus the same. He behaved worse than that to me, a deal. You wouldn't believe it, likely, but the day after we was married—as we sat at dinner—he said, says he, 'Give Miss Dorothy a glass of beer;' and me a married woman! Did you ever hear the likes of that now?" And the good dame laughed

heartily at this pleasant little reminiscence of by gone days.

* * * * *

Long after Grace was asleep that night, Cecil sat up thinking of Rupert. She could not sleep; she longed to be with him. His danger seemed to be greater when she was away. Cecil's extraordinary self-control deceived every one. Grace herself did not really know or appreciate the warmth of her sister's feelings. Even she would have been astonished had she awoke and seen the tears streaming down Cecil's cheek, and heard the muttered prayer for Rupert's safety.

Great self-control necessitates, to a certain extent, an apparent coldness of manner.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW BESSY LOAFER WOULD NOT "BE SWORE AT."

IT is not pleasant to lie under the stigma of having committed a crime of which you are entirely ignorant. It is not pleasant to be obliged to skulk about in the dark and hide in secret places, with the full knowledge that the officers of justice are at your heels. It is not pleasant to leave a young and beautiful bride, before the honeymoon is passed, for the companionship of rough and rude men; though those men be friends. So thought Rupert as he sought his lonely couch in the obscure but hitherto safe retreat provided for him by his friends the Flukes.

The following morning, before it was light, there was a sound of scuffling and seeming contention close by the door of Rupert's temporary abode. It awoke him instantly; the slightest noise did so in those days. He started up and listened. At first all was silent—perhaps he had been dreaming, for he was constantly dreaming of being taken. No; there it was again! He jumped out of bed, hastily drew on his clothes —during which operation the noise became louder—and hurried down stairs. As he reached the outer door, a heavy weight came against it, followed by a loud laugh; and he heard Dick Holder say, "If that warn't a fair throw, I never seen one. Come, Bob, you're beat, so shell out.'

"No, I bain't," growled Robert Cuff, as usual more than half drunk. "An' what's more, it 'ud take your master to do the trick; but I'm not a goin' to waste my time

a wrostlin' with you; I'm a goin' in 'ere. Where's Tom, an' them Nodders? Ain't they left the public yet? I never see such chaps for drinkin'. Tom's a'most allus drunk, he is."

Having delivered himself of the above sensible remarks, Robert Cuff began to belabour the door with his fists. "Hopen, in the King's name," he bawled out. "No! you wont, wont you? 'Ere goes, then."

Rupert guessed what was coming, and decided instantly upon his course of action. He slid back the bolts, unlocked and unlatched the door, and when Robert Cuff—who had retreated a few yards to gain a little extra impetus—came with his whole weight against it, he was precipitated headlong into the passage, there being no adequate resistance to enable him to keep his equilibrium.

The noise of Robert Cuff's fall brought

another actor upon the scene, in the shape of a greasy man in a dirty pair of canvas trousers, and a still dirtier red-flannel shirt. In one hand he carried a battered tin candlestick, in which flickered and guttered the stump of a departing "dip;" in the other, a thick knotted stick. As soon as this man appeared, Rupert stole softly up stairs again.

"Hullo, mate! what's up?" said the new comer to the prostrate constable, pushing him somewhat unceremoniously with his foot. "Come, get up, will you? I mun take you to the lock-up, I mun. I'm not a goin' to 'ave my 'ouse bruck into for nothin'."

Robert Cuff rose slowly and sulkily.

His questioner shoved the candle into his face. "Why! I'm blessed if it ain't Bob Cuff!" he cried;—"whoever 'd a thought o' you turnin' buggler? Why this *is* a precious go, this is!"

Robert Cuff indignantly denied any burglarious intentions, declaring that his presence in Mr. Loafer's house was purely accidental. He had, he said, been sky-larking with Dick Holder and had tumbled against the door, which, most unaccountably burst open, apparently of its own accord.

"Gammon!" said Mr. Loafer. "You tell that to the marines. Where is Dick Holder, then?"

"Here I am—all right, my boy! How are you, Dirge?" cried a cheery voice outside.

"Oh, oh! you *are* there then, are you? I thought it was all a bounce of this 'ere Bob Cuff's, who's got rather more aboard than he can carry, I can see. Well, Dick, an' what's up with you?"

"Oh, nothing' partickler, only a bit of a spree, as Bob says. Come along, Bob; it's time you was at home."

But Robert placed his back against the wall, and produced an ominous-looking piece of parchment. "I wunt goo afore I've read this 'ere warrant—so now then."

"I'll tell you what, Master Bob," said Loafer, whilst a portentous frown gathered on his rugged brow; "I owes you one for bustin' into my 'ouse in this audacious fashion, and if you don't make yourself scarce, I'm blessed if I don't pay you! You've no warrint to break into folk's 'ouses, 'ave you?"

Robert Cuff stood irresolute;—perhaps Dick would stand by him. "Dick Holder, assist me in the hexicooshun o' my dooty. I calls on you in the King's name, to——"

Here Mr. Loafer, breaking through all conventionalities, seized Robert by the collar, and brandishing his knotted stick aloft, he exclaimed in a ferocious voice, "Well, if

you're determined to have a lickin'—'ere goes !——"

Upon which Bob, by a violent effort, wrenched himself free from the detaining grasp, and shot into the open air with an alacrity that elicited peals of laughter from Dick Holder, who, whispering a word to Loafer, also took his departure.

The coast being clear, Rupert descended to the kitchen, whence sounds, as of a rushing wind and crackling flames, were heard. He beheld Mr. Loafer on his hands and knees before the fire, his face within a couple of inches of the bars, his cheeks inflated to a prodigious size, and he himself puffing away at the kindling sticks with the force of a steam-engine.

"Well, Dirge, you have got rid of that drunken idiot; I thought I should have died of laughing. I was looking over the stairs and saw him rush out of the passage

like one bewitched. What brought him here—do you know?"

Dirge left off blowing; and, turning his face towards Rupert, laughed a slow, silent, sepulchral laugh, before answering him. "I never see sich a cur as Bob Cuff in all my time—that I never did: what brought 'im 'ere! I knows no more nor a child what brought 'im 'ere, I don't; but I knows what scared 'im away agin, that I doos." And Mr. Loafer's subterranean laugh again rumbled.

"What was that he said about a warrant, Dirge?"

"I dunner, Mister Rupert; Bob didn't finish what 'e 'ad to say—Bob didn't; 'e cut and run like shot out of a shovel; 'e wont come a bugglin' o' me agin in a 'urry —Bob wont."

It was evident that Mr. Loafer had no knowledge of the cause of Robert Cuff's

visit, which Rupert very naturally put down to his own account.

"I thought it better to let him in quietly than to have him banging against the door in that way, Dirge; so I drew the bolts. He was making such a noise that I expected every minute it would attract attention, and I don't want visitors just now."

"Ay, ay, Mister Rupert, you knows what's what; you tumbled 'im in like a sack o' coals into a coal 'ole—you did. Bob wont come a bugglin' o' me agin in a hurry —Bob wont" (another subterranean rumble).

At this moment a very diminutive woman, of a peaceful and undemonstrative countenance, entered the kitchen. She dropped a curtsey to Rupert, with—"Your sarvant, sir," and at once entered upon her domestic duties with a silent activity and method denoting the master mind (if I may use the anachronism) of a true housekeeper. The

appearance of his wife was a sign to Dirge to desist from all further attempts upon the slowly igniting coals, at which he had hitherto at uncertain intervals puffed fiercely.

"I suppose it was accident that brought Robert Cuff and Dick Holder here this morning?" said Rupert, recurring to the fact of their appearance.

Mr. Loafer replied that, "May be 'twar, and may be 'twarn't," and he added that Dick Holder was a trump, and that Rupert need be under no apprehension of his betraying him, even if he knew that he was there. "Dick has the misfortune to be a Reveny man, but you may trust him for all that—you may."

"Yes," said Rupert, "I know I may—Dick and I are old friends; but I am tired to death of this hide-and-seek life, and wish with all my heart there was an end of it.

I wonder whether the Flukes will be here to-day, and when we shall get off. Confound that fellow Twiggem; if it were not for him we might manage it easy enough."

"Ay, ay, Mister Rupert; it's the Lonnoner as be the spoke in your wheel—that 'e bees; but we'll weather on 'im yet, see if we don't."

"Please, Mr. Rupert, breakfast be ready," said little Mrs. Loafer, bobbing a curtsey and looking Rupert straight in the face according to her usual custom.

"'Ow's Sall this morning, missis?" asked Dirge.

"Sall's as well as can be expecit," replied Mrs. Loafer, whose ordinary characteristics were brevity and terseness of speech, as well as placidity of deportment, although circumstances *might* arise to dispel and metamorphose each and all of these salient points of character.

"'As well as can be expecit' is just a woman's answer an' ain't got no sense in it. I expecs she's wus, and Mr. Rupert, happen, expecs she's better; she can't be both—can she, missis?"

"Be your tea to your likin', sir?" inquired Mrs. Loafer of Rupert, entirely ignoring her husband's logic.

Rupert replied that the tea was correct in every particular, and expressed his fears that Mrs. Stacey must have been disturbed by the noise that morning.

"Sister Stacey be a poor sleeper, sir; but 'tain't o' much cossequence, poor thing; she's a goin' fast, as I tells her; her sufferin's will soon be over."

"She's bin wus ever sin that Mister Hacre come to see 'er," observed Mr. Loafer.

"What brought him here? Dummer is not his parish," asked Rupert.

"No, but my missis and Sall be both on

'em Shingleton gerls, which be 'is parridge, and so 'e says as 'ow it's 'is business to see arter 'em when they're sick."

Mrs. Loafer's quiet, expressionless eyes lighted up wonderfully at the mention of "that Mr. Hacre." "*I* were out, Mister Rupert, when he come intruding of himself in 'ere, or I'd have showed 'im the door in a minute: whativer Loafer let 'im up stairs for, I don't know."

Was that excited countenance—were those quick, sharp tones the countenance and voice of undemonstrative Mrs. Loafer? Even so; the name of Mr. Acre acted like the shock of a galvanic battery upon the customary calmness of the diminutive lady.

"Well, well, Bessy, I did it for the best: 'ow was I to know as Mister Hacre 'ud make sich work wi' Sall as he did?—'ow was I?—'e looked quiet enough with 'is white 'ankercher, an' 'is long black coat

down to's 'eels; I niver see a more onoffenciver lookin' crittur."

"Well, and what harm did he do?" asked Rupert.

"What harm did he do?" said Mrs. Loafer, eagerly. "Why, he near druv my sister into th' 'ystirrics. He sat an hour and more aboosing of 'er shameful; and Loafer 'ere sat a smokin' his pipe and takin' no more notice nor nothin'."

"Well, well——" began her husband, when off went the lady again at score.

"When I come in, sister Stacey was cryin' fit to break her 'eart, and she shook like a haspin tree, and she said as Mr. Acre 'ad been askin' of 'er all about her past life —the most fragrant and ondecent questions ever you heard. If I'd a been there, I'd a tore 'is eyes out, I know!—whativer's the matter now?"

This last observation of Mrs. Loafer's was

called forth by a violent knocking overhead. Up she rose and away she went, determination on her brow and anger in her heart. She opened the door of her sister's room, and there sat Mr. Acre by her bedside, whilst Mrs. Stacey with flushed countenance and trembling voice was begging him to depart.

"You march out of this!" were the first words addressed to the clergyman by the irate Mrs. Loafer.

Mr. Acre sat still. "Mrs. Loafer, I believe you are probably not aware——"

"You march off with yourself," was the unceremonious interruption.

"My good woman," said Mr. Acre, eyeing his lilliputian antagonist with disdain, "I am a clergyman—the rector of Shingleton—and I have come here in my capacity of minister of the Gospel to——"

Here Mrs. Loafer seized the back of Mr.

Acre's chair and shook it violently. "You march off wi' yourself," she repeated. "Come, be quick now!"

Mr. Acre was compelled to rise. "Woman!" he cried in great wrath, "what do you mean by this insulting — this audacious conduct? Think not to frighten me from my duty. I shall not leave this room until I have awakened that miserable sinner" (pointing at the feeble and terrified invalid) "to a proper sense of her awful situation." Here the voice of the minister of the Gospel rose to a severe rant. "Your sin has found you out!" he shouted, again pointing his finger in a menacing manner at poor Mrs. Stacey. "Would you rush headlong into the next world clothed in the garments of deceit? Would you, even at the last moment, wrap around you the robe of hypocrisy? Away, I say, with these false and fatal delusions! Better, far better, to

expose your sin in all its naked deformity than——"

"Will you have done?" screamed Mrs. Loafer, seizing the hearth-brush and advancing towards the irate orator in a menacing attitude. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, talking in this ondecent way afore two female women? *I* wouldn't be seen—nor no modest woman neither—a goin' into the next room—let alone the next world—in sich an unbecomin' state as you has the impidence to speak of. I'd ketch 'old of the first garment as I come across sooner, thof you was to call it all the names you could lay your tongue to—and so would any woman as 'ad a regard for her char*ac*ter."

"Woman!" said Mr. Acre, retreating before the brandished brush; "woman! your ignorance misleads you. I tell you that the false covering of dissimulation will be your

ruin. Away with it then! cast it from you! pluck off——"

Mrs. Loafer took a step towards her antagonist, raising the brush in a threatening manner. "How dare you say as I have false clothes on?" she cried, drawing herself up to her full height of five feet. "I ain't got nothin' of the sort, I'd 'ave you know;—and if I 'ad, what business is't o' yourn? Come! you march out of this, I say, or I'll make you."

Mr. Acre retreated towards the door, but valiantly, with his face to the foe. One more stand he made for dignity and duty—and but one.

This tall, pale-faced young man, in shining broadcloth and spotless linen, was a striking contrast to the angry little body, in the homespun gown, who confronted him. Surely the imposing appearance of six feet of well-dressed mortality—to say nothing

of an university education and considerable natural audacity—must be more than a match for ignorance and vulgarity enthroned within the circumscribed limits of lilliputian Bessy Loafer! Here was no stalwart Dame Dorothy, backed by the strong-armed Catherine and other myrmidons, before whom the Reverend Amos Acre had been forced to flee. True, there were others in the house (he had heard them talking and laughing as he sneaked on tiptoe by the kitchen door), but it was not likely that they would interfere; they had not done so on his former visit. These thoughts passed rapidly through the busy brain of Mr. Acre: contempt for his antagonist was the result; he would try conclusions with her. Standing erect and stretching forth his open palm—not to bless but to ban—"Beware," he cried in a solemn voice, "beware how you bring down the

wrath of God upon you, by this violence to His minister, you sacrilegious woman! Cursed is he who——"

"I ain't a goin' to be swore at by you," burst forth Mrs. Loafer, "no, not if you was a *h*assbishop;" and without another word she aimed a deadly blow at the Reverend Amos with the hearth-brush.

The man of peace ducked his head and dodged the blow, then casting a mingled look of horror and alarm at the warlike Bessy, turned and fled.

No sooner had the echo of Mr. Acre's retreating footsteps died away than Mrs. Loafer was herself again. Her face glowed, her eyes flashed no longer, and the weapon in her dauntless hand was restored to its pristine and more legitimate occupation.

Mr. Acre's rapid transit down the steep and narrow stairs did not prevent his

catching sight of a face he knew through the half-open kitchen door as he passed.

Having cleared the dangerous premises, and considering himself safe, he halted, and said with a spiritual smile (of a Satanic character) upon his cadaverous countenance, "Oh ho! so *you* are *there*—are you?" That was all the Reverend Amos uttered aloud, but he carried on a long and most interesting internal conversation with himself (commonly called "mental"), the whole way back to Shingleton.

Arrived there, he instantly proceeded to the Jolly Mariners, where he found—as he had expected—Mr. Twiggem and the two Cuffs. They had just returned from an unsuccessful search at Dummer.

Robert Cuff was not a little surprised to find that he had accidentally tumbled into the very nest which contained at all events one of the birds he was on the look-out for.

His brother Tom remarked, "that it was just like him, he (Robert) never was right except by accident, and even then he had not the wit to take advantage of the lucky chance."

To which Bob replied that it would give him great satisfaction to see Tom in the hands of Loafer, who would, he affirmed, skin him alive upon the smallest provocation; the said Loafer being, according to Bob's account, quite as awkward a customer as Rupert himself—and far more savage.

(Mr. Acre thought that if Dirge Loafer were more ferocious than Mrs. L., he must indeed be a fearful man.)

"No time should be lost," said Mr. Acre, pompously. "I am certain that Rupert Vicars recognised me, and as we are not on friendly terms (for he has behaved in a manner that has forced me to drop his acquaintance), he will naturally suppose

that I may not be inclined to aid in concealing him and will consequently slip away. Not that I am actuated in what I do by any feeling of personal enmity; I am but performing a simple duty in my endeavours to hand over to justice a man who has so flagrantly transgressed the laws."

"Certainly," was Mr. Twiggem's rejoinder to this oratorical display, of which he understood but little and cared still less.

Mr. Acre having laid his train, departed, like a prudent man, out of harm's way. Let who would be blown up by the explosion, he would not; and that an explosion *would* take place if the respective parties met, he felt morally certain, for he knew Rupert Vicars well—he knew him to have a hasty temper and a strong arm; and, by all accounts, his companion Loafer was one of the same kidney.

Not that Mr. Acre was at all called

upon to accompany the constables; on the contrary, he was better away. I merely mention this idiosyncrasy of the reverend gentleman as forming a part—and a conspicuous part—of his character.

Mr. Acre having left the Jolly Mariners, the constables prepared to retrace their steps to Dummer.

Robert Cuff was for calling in the aid of his friends the Nodders, if they could come to any reasonable terms with regard to the reward, a small portion of which he was willing to give up for the sake of "makin' things safe," as he called it (the "things" being himself). But when Mr. Twiggem explained that if the Nodders accompanied them at all, they would be entitled to share and share alike, Robert withdrew his proposal; more especially as Mr. Twiggem asserted that they should only have to deal with one man—Loafer not being "wanted;"

"and," said the London policeman, "if us three can't tackle one man, why we'd best—go to bed—that's all I 'ave to say."

This point being settled, they sallied forth to the capture.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE YOUNG BARONET APPEARS.

IF Miss Clarissa Bombolt or Mr. Adolphus Spangle be introduced with a flourish of trumpets, great things are naturally expected of them, and woe betide them if they disappoint these expectations; but if they are allowed to sneak quietly on the stage—to mingle with the other actors and actresses without any formal introduction to the audience—they may not, it is true, gain much applause, but they will probably escape being hissed.

A fellow who tumbles on to a stage or

into a story head over heels, with—"here we are! how do you like us?" blows his own trumpet; that is his key-note, and it behoves him to sing in tune, for a *flat* fool will meet with no mercy.

Sir Charles Dimdale was standing with his back to the fire and his coat tails over his arms—after the manner of an ancient Briton—whilst Lady Jane was vainly endeavouring to impart or to receive information. She could do neither—at least to her satisfaction. In her vexation, she thought, as she gazed with fond admiration on the curling black hair and chiselled features of her very handsome son, of what her husband had once said to her, and for the first time in her life she concurred in the opinion, although at the time it was given she had thought it harsh and unjust. "Charley has a handsome face enough, and a well-shaped head,

but monstrous few brains inside it, I'm afraid."

Such had been the dictum of the late Sir Charles, and the career of the son had entirely justified the sagacity of the father. Great talents when allied to great idleness seldom achieve success; but the result of idleness and dulness combined is indeed deplorable.

And yet the youthful Sir Charles would have opened his large sleepy eyes to their fullest extent, with astonishment and disbelief, had any one hinted to him that he was either dull or ignorant. He was a good cricketer—a fair shot—a famous rider—and a capital billiard player; he had also a good ear for music, and painted in oils. *He* dull and ignorant! how he would have laughed at the accusation. It would not have offended him in the least; not a bit more than if you had called him ugly

(which would have been a manifest absurdity), for the youth was quite as much impressed with the beauty of his mind as with that of his person. "He was up to a thing or two" he flattered himself. That was his opinion when he left Oxford after three vain attempts at taking his "little go;" but now—returning from his tour on the Continent—he had indeed "grown ten times perter than before," but not one whit wiser.

In the benighted times of which I write, this type of young gentleman was to be met with everywhere. Ignorance and presumption graced—or disgraced (opinions differed on that point) the beardless face of many a brainless youth. Now, it is of course quite a different matter. The young men of this enlightened age really *do* know everything better than their seniors; we old fellows, being perfectly aware of that

fact, are content to be shoved on one side. Should we hazard an opinion in the presence of a young gentleman of five-and-twenty—or under—we are of course contradicted: this neither astonishes nor offends us.

But such was not the case—forty—or even thirty years ago. At that time (you will scarcely believe it) there positively were young gentlemen in England who did not know so much as their fathers! You shake your head in unbelief, and you exclaim—"Come, come! I never said a word about Cecil's scramble down the cliff that stormy night, nor yet about Mr. Amos running away from little Mrs. Loafer, though of course I knew they were both tremendous 'crams;' but to tell me there ever was a time in England when a young man of twenty did *not* know better than his father of fifty, is a little too much!"

"So you have given the living of Shingleton to Amos Acre; what made you do that, mother?"

"My dear, he was your tutor at Oxford, you know, and a very clever young man; and, besides that, he was highly recommended by the Bishop of——"

"Oh yes, I dare say; the Bishop of —— would recommend him, of course, because Amy Acre (as we used to call him), bows and scrapes, and drones in the church just as the Bishop does himself. But he's not clever—not he! he can't do anything. Why, I'd back myself to give him fifteen out of twenty-four at billiards. And as for cricket, I'll lay ten pounds I bowl him out five times in twenty balls."

"My dear Charles, cricket and billiards are all very well in their way, but there are other things of higher consequence. I have always heard that Mr. Acre is a good

classical scholar—indeed he must be, for he took honours, I remember."

"Oh! bother the classics! what's the use of them? Amy Acre could never do anything worth doing: he thought he was a fast runner, and was always boasting of his running till I gave him ten yards out of a hundred and beat him. He's a regular soft. I wonder at your giving the living to him."

Lady Jane sighed and poured out the tea.

A mother will never acknowledge the imperfections of her children to another—seldom even to herself;—but Lady Jane was too sensible and too refined not to perceive the boasting, bragging egotism of her handsome son. It pained her—it jarred against her nature—which was a delicate, retiring, humble nature; and the question *would* force itself upon her, "What has this boaster to boast of?"

In good faith, little enough! He had been two years abroad—ever since his coming of age—and yet his mother could not get him to describe a single thing he had seen. She asked him how he liked Florence.

"Oh, pretty well; I don't think much of the Arno, though; why, I offered to bet Jones of the Rifle Brigade five pounds that I would swim across it in five-and-twenty strokes—so I would too, easy."

Lady Jane next tried the picture galleries—which had he admired most—the collection at the Pitti Palace, or the Royal collection?

He didn't know—he thought them much of a muchness. "But, I say," he added, "I had rare fun with an old file who was copying one of the old masters—as they call them. I asked him how long he had been at it. 'About a week,' he said; so I told

him I'd lay five pounds I painted a better picture than his in forty-eight hours—and so I would. But he was as mad as a hatter, and swore like a trooper at me."

"You were very foolish for saying anything of the sort, Charles. But was the man an Englishman? or how could he understand you?"

"Oh, no, he was a Frenchman; my *laquais de place* told him what I said, and I knew by the shape of his mouth that he was swearing at me. Ha, ha! it was as good as a play."

Lady Jane looked serious and sorrowful. Alas! poor lady, she found out when too late, that in sparing the rod she had spoilt not only the child, but the man. Her late husband was a man of singularly clear perceptions and correct judgment, but unluckily, of the most indolent disposition; he contented himself with enunciating great

truths, but seldom took the trouble of enforcing them. "You are spoiling this fellow, Jane, as fast as you can spoil him, and some of these days you'll be sorry for it." "Oh, my dear," would the fond mother reply, "he is such a child; it does not do always to be thwarting and contradicting children; it makes them cross and ill-tempered." "Ah, well, have your own way, Jenny," Sir Charles would say; "only mind this, if you deny him nothing now, he will deny himself nothing by-and-by: I never knew a spoilt child that did not grow up either knave or fool—sometimes both."

How often since her husband's death had Lady Jane called to mind and mused over conversations such as the above! how bitterly had she repented of her foolish, mistaken fondness for her only son! Ay, "mistaken fondness"—the very words used

by Sir Charles on more than one occasion, and which, at the time, she had thought so unjust—nay, unkind.

"My dear Jane," he had one day said, in a more serious tone than usual, "if I were to box Charley's ears and send him to the nursery for this outrageous burst of temper, you would think me very hard-hearted and cruel, perhaps; but believe me, that to tell him he shall have what he is crying for—if he will be a good boy, is far more cruel; you are sowing seeds which will bear a bitter harvest some of these days, I know."

What a comfort, what a satisfaction it must be to the mothers of the present generation that the absurd system of spoiling children has gone by—is obsolete—so completely a thing of the past—belonging to the dark ages of which I write!

English children now are—as is well

known—what their doting mothers assert them to be—namely, the finest, most beautiful, the best tempered, and the largest children in the world—for babies —like bullocks—are, I have invariably observed, valued in proportion to their size and weight.

I once was present when the comparative merits of two babies were under discussion: the palm of beauty was awarded to Mrs. A.'s phenomenon; upon which Mrs. B., who could not gainsay the verdict, seeing that the incipient features (eyes included) of her infant, were entirely obscured by rolls of fat, observed, "but *my* baby is much the heaviest—only feel what a weight he is!"

He *was* much the heaviest, and Mrs. B. sat down a proud and happy woman, whilst Mrs. A., on the contrary, notwithstanding the acknowledged beauty of her infant,

seemed deeply to feel the disgrace of its lightness.

The proverb says, "He that takes the child by the hand takes the mother by the heart." This is no doubt true, but some children—especially if they have "peculiar dispositions," are difficult to conciliate, they rebel against the advance of strangers. If the little dears are blessed with high spirits they kick and spit at people; if they are of a sensitive and delicate mental organization they roar aloud and cry lustily. These idiosyncrasies of infantine nature render the task of "taking a child by the hand" a difficult matter. I think I know of a shorter cut to the favour of the mother. Make yourself accurately acquainted with the exact age of the child; then tell the mother, that from its size and weight you would have supposed it to be six months older—and the day is won.

I could say many words about "peculiar dispositions" and their treatment, but as it is just possible that you may not be as much interested in the subject of children as I am, I will forbear; merely observing *en passant*, that whenever the aforesaid term has been applied to a child with whom I was acquainted, I never noted any peculiarity other than that of extreme bad temper, and a determination to have its own way; the treatment for which peculiarity consisted in letting it have its own way.

* * * * *

"Well, Charley, and what did you think of Rome?" was Lady Jane's next question.

"Oh, I don't know; I liked it well enough at first, but it's a stupid place after all: the worst restaurants on the Continent, and not a cigar to be had, for love or money fit to smoke."

"Well, my dear, but the picture-galleries and the churches and the ruins—have you nothing to say about them?"

"Oh, they were all very fine, of course, very grand and all that; but to tell the truth, I was sick to death of picture-galleries and churches after a fortnight's work, and almost declared I'd never go into either the one or the other again."

"Nonsense, Charles; don't talk in that way; did you see the Colosseum by moonlight?"

"Yes—Jones would lug me there; but what a humbug it is! why you can see it twice as well by daylight, as I told a lot of English ladies and gentlemen who were staring up at it the night we went."

"But the effect, my dear—the effect of the moonlight upon that grand old ruin—surely you were struck with *that?*"

"Yes—oh, yes, of course; but as I said

to Miss Oakes, who was talking about 'the effect' just as you do, mother, 'I'll lay you five pounds that the effect will be that you will catch cold—and so she did. By-the-bye, Miss Oakes was something like Cecil Meadows—not half so handsome though, or as Grace either. Why don't you have those girls here, mother? It can't be much fun for them staying at Hollowhill with those vulgar Dangers."

"I shall not have Grace here for you to flirt with, Charley; and as for Cecil, you forget she is married."

"Married? yes; but you told me that her husband was 'wanted,' as they say, for forging something. I'm sorry for Rupert, I always liked him; I suppose I shall have to get another agent—what a bore!"

Lady Jane explained to her son for the twentieth time that Rupert had not committed a forgery, but that he had sacrificed

himself for the time being, from a sense of gratitude to their family.

"Oh, ah, yes! I forgot. Rupert is a trump, I always liked him. He can throw a cricket-ball a hundred yards, backwards and forwards: I'll bet five pounds there is not another man in England can do it."

"My dear Charles, I wish you would not be so ready with your bets: bets are senseless things, and prove nothing but the folly of those who make them. Rupert Vicars can do many more useful things than throw cricket-balls; and I hope when you go to Rookmoor Castle, you will employ yourself in some more profitable manner than cricketing and shooting all day long."

Sir Charles laughed gaily.

"We don't play cricket in the winter, mother; and as for shooting and hunting and all that, you don't expect or wish me to give them up, surely?"

"No, Charley, I don't wish you to give them up; but they are only amusements, and we are not sent into the world merely to amuse ourselves. We all have duties to perform, and your duty, as landlord of a fine property, is to attend to that property; to make yourself acquainted with your tenants, with their characters and circumstances, and to——"

Here her ladyship's speech was cut short, and her mouth effectually shut with a kiss. The spoilt boy (for he was little better than a boy, although nearly twenty-three years of age), threw his arms round his mother's neck.

"Bother all that, mamma," he said. "Rupert will do all that much better than I can. But—I say! has old Uncle Jacob really committed forgery? Why, he may be transported!"

It was of no use attempting to talk either

sensibly or seriously to "Charley," so at least Lady Jane said; she therefore contented herself with stroking his curling black hair, and returning his smile and kiss with interest.

Sir Charles was by no means a bad-tempered young man; there was no reason why he should be: he had good health, good looks, and a fine estate; moreover he was seldom, if ever, thwarted in anything.

That "thwarting" is, after all, the greatest trial of temper: if we could but always do exactly as we like, what a good-humoured race of mortals we should be!

No, Sir Charles was not bad-tempered, neither was he a bad fellow among his associates. I must not blacken his character, but truth compels me to own that he had a sad habit of holding forth upon subjects of which he was profoundly ignorant,

and that he was too fond of the personal pronoun *I*.

There was certainly an excuse for the first mentioned failing; for, as a friend of his observed once upon a time, "If Charley Dimdale only spoke of what he thoroughly understood, he would never open his lips."

"By-the-bye," said Lady Jane, when she had done admiring her son's lustrous eyes and long black eyelashes, "I quite forgot to tell you a piece of news I received this morning: I wonder I did not think of it when you were talking about those girls. What do you think of Grace being engaged to be married?"

Lady Jane had risen from the breakfast-table, and her back was towards her son when she spoke; she therefore saw neither his start of surprise nor the flush which suffused his cheek.

"Oh! is she? to whom?" was all he said.

He was told to guess, but he declined; he knew of no one likely, "Acre, perhaps?"

"Mr. Acre, my dear? why he has scarcely been here six months, and has not seen Grace to speak to half-a-dozen times, probably (we know that her ladyship was mistaken there). Oh, no, a much older acquaintance than Mr. Acre. Come, guess again; you know the person very well."

Sir Charles thought for a minute or two.

"You don't mean old Painter?" he suddenly exclaimed.

"Yes, I do. Mr. Painter is the happy man."

"Why, he is twenty years older than Grace, if he is a day; it can't be true, mother."

Lady Jane handed him a note; it was from Cecil. "Read that, Charley."

He did read it, his face getting redder the while, and his lips paler and tighter.

"What a fool the girl is to marry a man old enough to be her father! She might have done better than that," he said.

"If *she* does not care about the difference of age, *we* need not, my dear. Mr. Painter is a most respectable man, bears a high character both morally and in his profession, and is very comfortably off, I should think."

"In short, you approve the match, mother, and mean to give your consent?"

"My consent is not necessary, Charley; but I do approve Grace's choice, certainly. I have known Mr Painter a long while."

"Yes, most people have," muttered Sir Charles, as he thrust his hands in his pockets and marched out of the room. On reaching the hall, he snatched up his hat and

set off walking at his best pace for Hollowhill.

The blindness of ancient ladies and gentlemen to the propensities inherent in young nature has always struck me as being one of the most remarkable of the many remarkable phenomena which present themselves at every turn for the investigation of the curious and the learned. Why people, whether of ordinary or extraordinary intelligence—it matters not which—should, the moment the passions and feelings of youth have died out in themselves, ignore their existence in others, I cannot for the life of me imagine. And yet they do—it is patent to the world that they do. *Experientia docet* is a mistake, it ought to have been *experientia doceret*, for it certainly never does teach anything. History, whether of a nation or of an individual, is invariably regarded in the light of an old almanack, only good for the time of which

it treats: though it is indeed written for our learning, how few there be (as a rule) who profit by it.

Mrs. A. marries her first cousin (shocking all her relations by so doing); and yet she allows her daughters Mary and Ann, unrestrained intercourse with *their* first cousins, and when Charles proposes for Mary, Mrs. A. will be very angry and extremely surprised, and say, "Whoever would have thought of such a thing!"

Thus Lady Jane Dimdale, acting in conformity with the blindness aforesaid, had allowed free intercourse between her son and her two singularly pretty protégées, without one qualm or misgiving crossing her mind as to the probable or even possible result of what I must be allowed to call, her most reprehensible carelessness.

When young people, from their earliest recollections, have been playmates and

friends, it is very difficult to make them understand the necessity of less familiarity as they grow up! Not that Lady Jane had ever attempted to inculcate any lesson of the sort. It had been "Cecil"—"Grace"—"Charley" even up to the time of his going abroad, and if he had not actually proposed to Grace before he left the Rookery, he had flirted with her desperately. Of Cecil he was always rather afraid, she was too clever and too independent to suit him; besides, he felt sure that Grace liked him best, which was a great fact in her favour; like begets like most assuredly.

He was quite right in the above supposition; Cecil *was* too clever ever to fall in love with a man who had nothing but his good looks to recommend him. She admired his fine eyes and long eyelashes, his white teeth and beautifully chiselled features—but she never could love him, she would

as soon have thought of loving a beautiful picture, or a statue.

But the sisters are even now, as he walks towards Hollowhill, talking of him; we will listen, and then we shall know all about it.

Cecil (*loquitur*): "I wonder when Sir Charles will come home. Lady Jane told me last Wednesday that she was expecting him daily."

"Why do you call him 'Sir Charles,' Cecil? it sounds so odd; you never used to do so."

"I have a great objection to young ladies calling gentlemen to whom they are not related, by their Christian names; besides, Sir Charles Dimdale is our superior in social position, and I don't think we have any business to call him 'Charley' any longer; it was all very well when we were school-girls and he a boy."

"I don't feel as if I should ever be able

to call him Sir Charles; and I am sure, if I did, he would think it very formal and unkind of me," persisted Grace.

"I hope you *will* call him Sir Charles; I think you are even more bound to do so than I am."

"How so?" said Grace, opening her large blue eyes to their fullest extent.

"Because he used to flirt with you more than he did with me, and as you are engaged to another, everything approaching to familiarity with him should be put a stop to at once and for ever," said Cecil, decidedly.

Grace made no reply, but the colour deepened on her cheek very perceptibly, for she thought of the affectionate farewell, of which Cecil knew nothing, and wondered for the hundredth time whether the kiss that Charley had given her, had meant anything beyond brotherly love. She felt so uncomfortable under Cecil's scrutiny that she rose

to leave the room, but in passing the window she stopped suddenly, and colouring to the eyes, cried out—"Oh, Cecil! there's Charley."



CHAPTER VIII.

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF DIRGE LOAFER'S CLOCK, AND THE DINNER AT HOLLOW-HILL.

NO sooner had the Reverend Amos Acre left Dirge Loafer's cottage, than Rupert Vicars became disagreeably conscious of the danger which his unpardonable want of care might bring upon him.

"What a blockhead I was," he said to Dirge, "to expose myself as I did, when that fellow passed the door; I was in hopes he would not have recognised me in this disguise, but he did. I saw by the expression of his eye that he did."

"You knowed him afore, did you, Mister Rupert?"

"Oh, yes! we were at school together. Well, Dirge, I must be off, and that at once; Acre will be certain to set the blood-hounds after me. He owes me a grudge, and he will not lose so good an opportunity of repaying it, for he is an ill-conditioned cur, if ever there was one."

"No call for you to budge out of this 'ere 'ouse, Master Rupert—none whatsomever; you be a biggish chap, axin' your pardin—that you be; but, lor bless you! I'se stowed away a precious sight more cargo than 'ud stan' in your shoes, that I 'as—let Dirge Loafer alone for bamboozlin' the beaks. Lors! I'd turn them Cuffs roun' my finger as easy as I'd swally a potaty—that I would."

"Ay, ay, but there's the London policeman, who is a sharpish fellow, and not so easy to blind, I'm afraid."

"Not s' easy to blind!" repeated Dirge, in the most contemptuous tone; "not by some people, mayhap; but if *I* don't blind 'im I'll eat 'im, that's what I'll do. Look you here, Mister Rupert."

Dirge thrust his hand behind a clock which loudly ticked, in an unusually large case, against one side of the kitchen wall: he touched a spring, and the clock, case and all, moved slowly from its position for the space of about two feet. Again a spring was pressed, and a panel of the wainscot pushed back, affording ample room for a man (even of Rupert's dimensions) to pass through the opening.

"There, Mister Rupert! what do you think of that for a hidin'-place? Lors! why there's six kegs of sperrits there this minute, an' plenty of room for you besides; why, I'se sin more nor twenty kegs in there at a time, an' not half full nether."

"That is a clever contrivance, Dirge, I must say."

"I should think it wor," said Dirge, eyeing the secret hiding-place with evident satisfaction and pride. "I'se 'ad this 'ouse as full of reveny men as that place wor of sperrits, but they niver come together, some'ow."

Dirge's interior shook with suppressed laughter as he closed the aperture in the wainscot and caused the clock to resume its former position.

It was arranged that a strict watch should be kept, in order that no one should approach the cottage unperceived; and that upon the first intimation of danger, Rupert should enter the spirit-vault, for so it might properly be called.

"But Acre will swear that he saw me in the kitchen. How will you get over that?" asked Rupert.

"Easy enough, easy enough: you let me alone for that, Mister Rupert. But we must tell the missis all about it; she'll settle the Cuffs as easy as she did the other chap—that she will."

Bessie was duly acquainted with the necessary particulars, receiving the information with an impassive countenance; the only commentary she vouchsafed to Rupert's reiterated injunctions "to keep a sharp look-out" was a curtsey, bobbed quickly, followed by a rapid flight into the passage, where, broom in hand, she recommenced her interrupted sweepings.

Dirge stepped out for a minute to speak a word, as he said, with Tim Trimmer, the blacksmith. He soon returned, and nothing worthy of note occurred till Bessie re-entered the kitchen, and bobbing another curtsey, said briefly, "They're a-comin'."

Rupert was soon installed in his secret

cell; and, sitting across a keg of Cognac, waited patiently for what was to follow.

I will not inflict upon you a second edition (delightful sound!) of Mr. Twiggem's exploits. You may rest assured that Mr. Loafer's cottage was as effectually searched as was Hollowhill; or, I should rather say, as ineffectually; and the former, being a much smaller tenement, was turned inside out in a proportionably shorter time.

The baffled bloodhounds of the law were solacing themselves with a can of ale in Dirge Loafer's kitchen; that worthy and his wife being present, no doubt "on hospitable thoughts intent," when Mr. Twiggem observed, for the twentieth time, "But Mr. Acre swore as *he* saw Rupert Vicars in this kitchen, now then!"

For the twentieth time did Dirge Loafer deride what he called "the *h*optical di-

loogin," of the Reverend Amos. For the twentieth time did he assert that it was Tim Trimmer the blacksmith, and not Rupert Vicars, whom the Reverend Amos had seen in his rapid transit past the kitchen door.

"Well," said Mr. Loafer at last, "ef Rupert Vicars were 'ere when Mister *H*acre cut an' run, 'e's 'ere now, 'e is, so 'elp yourselves to 'im; I don't want 'im, I don't!"

Mr. Twiggem's practised eye was on Loafer as he spoke, but he could detect nothing suspicious either in voice or manner.

There was a footstep in the passage and a knock at the door.

"Come in, do," growled Dirge Loafer, in a sulky tone; "it seems as tho' I was to 'ave my 'ouse full of idlers this mornin'."

The door opened, and a dark-featured

brawny man, with bare arms and chest, and a dirty leather apron, entered the room. He stared at Twiggem, nodded to the Cuffs, and looked around him.

"Well, Tim, what now, eh?" said Mr. Loafer.

"All right, Dirge," replied Tim, as he stooped and picked up something from under the table. "I left this 'ere knife 'ere a while agoo, an' now I wants it, as I has a hoss to shoe."

With that Tim strode towards the door, apparently in great haste, when Mr. Twiggem called to him.

"Stop a bit, my man, stop a bit. Don't you be in such a hurry. 'Ow long ago might it be since you were here, pray?"

"What's that to you?" replied Tim, savagely.

"Well, it's something to me, and it's

may be something to you. Shut the door, Mr. Cuff; and keep it shut."

This to Robert, who, with a bad grace, did as he was ordered.

Mr. Twiggem then explained to Tim who he was, and the nature of his errand. But the bump of reverence must have been entirely wanting in Tim's cranium, for he did not seem to be at all impressed either with veneration or awe at the sight of the London policeman.

"You ain't got no warrant to take me, 'ave you?" he asked.

Mr. Twiggem was obliged to own that he had not; affirming at the same time, that he had an undoubted right to ask him what questions he pleased; and that it was his (Tim's) duty to answer them.

Tim laughed scornfully. "If so be you wants to ast me any questions, it's your best ways to come over to the shop where

I'm now a-goin'—I ain't got no time to stan' jawin' 'ere. Come! you brish off wi' yourself, will you?" he added to Robert Cuff.

Not receiving an immediate reply—for Ugly Bob was calculating in his mind the odds both for and against moving—Tim laid hold of his collar, and, without much apparent effort, jerked him into the middle of the room.

Up started Mr. Twiggem, but instead of rushing to the aid of his insulted subordinate, he contented himself with appealing to Mr. Loafer. "In the King's name—in the King's name!" he cried, "I charge you to arrest this man for hinterfering with the constable in the hexecution of 'is duty."

Tim vouchsafed no reply, but strode steadily on, whilst Mr. Loafer, equally regardless of Mr. Twiggem's appeal, merely

said, "Pick yourself up, Bob, and 'elp yourself to another glass of beer."

Bob obeyed both commands, muttering something about "the boards being so slippery."

"Now, gen'lemen, you finish this 'ere can, and welcome; but I must go about my business, I must."

Thus speaking, Mr. Loafer vanished from the sight of the beer-thirsty constables.

Whether these three champions of the law did or did not finish the can of beer, there is no authentic record. My private opinion is that they did. But I am bound to say, that my opinion is borne out by no reliable evidence of the transaction in question; it rests entirely upon my previous knowledge of the general habits and usages of the constables of that day, and of the "Handcuffs" in particular.

Dirge Loafer, who was (ostensibly) a marine store dealer, troubled himself no more with his visitors, but began rummaging amongst his miscellaneous goods in the front shop, whistling and singing alternately snatches of sea-songs more remarkable for strength of expression than delicacy of sentiment.

How long the constables, if left to themselves, would have remained in Mr. Loafer's kitchen, it were hard to say; but they were not left long alone. Mrs. Loafer bustled in, broom in hand, and, without even the ghost of a bob, began vigorously to sweep up, around, about, and over the hobnailed hoofs of the beer-drinkers. Having accomplished this domestic duty to her own satisfaction (whatever it might have been to that of her visitors whose feet and ankles she banged unmercifully and apparently unnecessarily with the hard

edge of the broom), she armed herself with a pan of damp sand, which she sprinkled liberally and impartially over the brick floor and the constables' legs.

This was a strong hint on the part of Mrs. Loafer that the men of law were in her way, and as such it was received.

"Come, we might as well be going; I've 'ad beer enough, and I don't want any more sand," said Mr. Twiggem, rising and casting a savage glance at Bessy, who, however, heeded it not.

As soon as the unwelcome visitors were fairly gone, Rupert issued forth from the spirit vault, and betook himself to his dormitory in the attic, where he was presently joined by Dirge Loafer and Bill Fluke, with whom he had a long and earnest conversation.

Bill declared that the *Saucy Sally* was ready to put to sea at a moment's notice,

but that they dared not make the attempt until the search after the Colonel and Rupert had slackened; which would not be the case, he observed, as long as the London policeman remained in the neighbourhood.

"But," he added, "he'll go soon, Mr. Rupert; I know when these birds are thinkin' o' takin' flight, an' I seen signs o' flittin' about that Twiggem; he'll be off afore long, I know."

Rupert hoped it would be so, for he was heartily sick of his hide-and-seek life, he said, and even hinted at giving himself up. But his friends strongly protested against such a proceeding, not only on his own account but on that of Colonel Dimdale, whose chance of escape would be materially lessened were Rupert taken. Not that either Dirge Loafer or Bill Fluke cared, or pretended to care, whether the Colonel was taken or not; but they had wit enough to

see that Rupert did. In the meantime something must be done to stop Mr. Acre's tongue, or a fresh search of Loafer's house would undoubtedly be instituted and a strict watch kept on the place.

But let us now see how things are going on at Hollowhill.

The exclamation from Grace of "There's Charlie!" smote on Cecil's heart. The mingled confusion and delight that shone in her sister's eyes at the sight of Sir Charles alarmed her. She knew that Grace had neither her strength of mind nor firmness of purpose; and if her feelings for the young Baronet were beyond those of friendship, would she have courage to trample them under foot as in her present position she was bound to do?

These thoughts raced through Cecil's mind as she slowly followed Grace.

On reaching the parlour she found her

sister standing in the middle of the room laughing and blushing; whilst Sir Charles, holding both her hands in his, was repeating in a voice trembling with many passions, of which anger seemed the dominant one, this set *formula*:—"Are you engaged to be married, Grace?"

"Welcome back to England and to Hollowhill, Sir Charles," said Cecil, coming forward and holding out her hand, which obliged him to liberate one of Grace's that he might respond to the salutation. "Yes," continued Cecil, "Grace is engaged to be married to one whom we all know and like very much—to Mr. Painter. Grace dear, go and tell Aunt Dorothy that Sir Charles is here; she will be so glad to see him."

Grace snatched the still imprisoned hand away with some difficulty, and hurried from the room.

The young Baronet stood wrathful and

defiant, like a bull at bay. He looked as if he would have liked to run at Cecil and toss her out of the window; but her eyes cowed him, they always did so when the pupils contracted and the lids expanded. So Sir Charles laughed and looked foolish, and Cecil, pitying his confusion, talked about his travels and his journey home; but she was not more successful (rather less so, if possible) than Lady Jane in extracting information.

Dame Dorothy soon made her appearance, followed closely by Grace and Jane.

"Bless my heart! oh, dear! why, this *is* a surprise, Sir Charles!" cried the dame, shaking the young gentleman heartily by the hand. "I never heard that you was come back, though I knew, of course, that you was expected. When did you arrive, sir?"

Before Sir Charles could reply, Dame

Dorothy called out—"Where's Danger? wherever is Richard Danger? Kattern! Kattern! Lor a mussy! wherever has that girl gone to? Jane, I wish you'd just step into the yard and see. Oh, here is Kattern! Kattern, run and see if you can find the master, and tell him Sir Charles is here—run! He will be so glad to see you, Sir Charles. And how have you been, sir, since you've been away? Deary me, it seems but yesterday as you drove by Hollowhill to catch the London mail; and yet, if the truth was told, 'tis more than a year ago, I do believe."

"It's nearly two years ago!" almost shouted the Baronet. It was the first chance he had since the dame's entrance of getting in a word, and she was off again at score.

"Dear heart! was it so long ago as that? Well, it might be indeed, for you are greatly

altered, Sir Charles; grown from a boy into a man, if I may be so bold as to say it; don't you think so, Cecil? Don't you think Sir Charles is grown stouter and more manlier, Grace? I'm sure he is. Why, you hadn't a hair on your face when you left, Sir Charles, and now you have a famous growth of down on your lip. You needn't blush about it, sir, it becomes you well, it does indeed."

"Blush about it!"—well he might! His pet moustache to be called "a famous growth of down"—*down!*—some of the hairs were upwards of three inches long; he knew it—could swear to it—he had measured them, curled them (by the aid of a little wax) three whole turns round his finger,—*down, indeed!*

The farmer came in most opportunely at this critical moment; Cecil was vigorously biting her lip, to hide, if possible, the play

of her risible muscles; which manœuvre Sir Charles perceived and, as a matter of course, his ire was again roused, and this time certainly from a very legitimate cause. What young man could see unmoved his maiden moustachios laughed at, I should like to know?

Grace was anything but the picture of ease and contentment. The dame's appeal to her in favour of the improved personal appearance of the Baronet had by no means tended to compose the flutter of her spirits, although her aunt's continuous eloquence had precluded the necessity of reply. She had looked involuntarily at Sir Charles, and involuntarily at Cecil; and at each rapid glance the roses had reddened distressingly on the poor girl's cheek. Farmer Danger's appearance was, therefore, a great relief to most of the party; his daughter Jane indeed excepted. In vain she simpered, in

vain she murmured (in a stage murmur), "*so* handsome!" when the young Baronet's charms were under discussion;—in vain she curtsied as she caught a passing "blink o' his bonnie black ee"—he heeded her not; beyond the first "How do you do, Jane? I hope you are quite well," Sir Charles had seemed unconscious of her existence. There was no particular reason why he should have noticed her more, that I am aware of; but Jane Danger must have thought otherwise, for she had a jaundiced, disappointed look upon her countenance, the reverse of attractive.

The good farmer came in, his face all aglow. "Why, Sir Charles, I am main glad to see *you*, that I be!" he exclaimed, half extending his hand but quickly drawing it back again.

Sir Charles, however, insisted upon shaking hands with him.

"No, no, Sir Charles, I ain't fit, for my hands be mortial hot, and not over clean nether: to tell the truth, I——"

"Lor a mussy, Richard Danger," broke in the dame, "whatever have you been a doing? Fit to shake Sir Charles by the hand! I should think not indeed! Why, what have you been after?"

"Well, if you must know, dame, I've been helping the men turn a dung-mixen, and I know I'm not fit to be seen; but when Kattern told me as you was in the house, Sir Charles, why I'd no thought but just to come and see you."

The young Baronet smiled graciously, and thanked the honest farmer for his hot haste; not so Dame Dorothy: she lifted up her hands and eyes perfectly aghast at the dreadful admissions.

"And to come in here, into my best parlour, with your boots covered with dirt,

and smelling worse than a foumart! Richard Danger, I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself: go out and wipe your boots, do, and wash your hands and make yourself look respectable; what'll Sir Charles think of such manners, I wonder!"

Sir Charles laughed, and said that he liked the smell of the stable and hoped Mr. Danger would not put himself out on his account.

"It's very good of you to say so, Sir Charles, but he must put himself out on my account, if he doesn't on yours. Come now, there's a good man, go and clean yourself; there's dinner a'most ready, and I'm sure you're not fit to sit down at a Christian table."

"The dame's right, Sir Charles; she's purely right, that she is. I'm not fit nether for dinner nor company; but as I was saying, *di*rectly I heard as you——"

"There, there, Richard, Sir Charles don't want to hear all that again, I know; you go along," and suiting the action to the words, the dame fairly pushed the unsavoury farmer out of the room.

"Well," said the young man, rising as Catherine came in to lay the cloth, "I must be off."

"If you would stay and take a snack with us, Sir Charles, there's as beautiful a piece of roast pork as ever you saw—though I say it as shouldn't, seeing it's our own feeding; and there's a dish of fricasseed rabbit for the young ladies, who'll be proud to share it with you, I am sure (Grace felt that *she* would, and longed to say so); and there's a currant tart, Sir Charles, the like of which you've not seen in furrin parts, I know—the fruit's as fresh as though it was only gathered yesterday. I shouldn't praise my own preserves, but

truth is truth; and your mother, Lady Jane, would bear me out, for I gave her the receipt at her own pertickler desire. I hope Lady Jane is well, Sir Charles? I declare the surprise and pleasure of secing you have quite made me forget my manners; and so I needn't have been so hard upon Richard, you'll say. And here he is, sure enough! and Kattern with the pork and ale. Do sit down and take something, sir."

The young Baronet required very little pressing. The aroma from the roast pork was delicious; but it was not that which decided him to remain.

How beautiful Grace looked! he could scarcely take his eyes off her. Her embarrassment and confusion added to her beauty—her blushes became her.

In spite of Dame Dorothy's natural acuteness and penetration, she was blind

as a bat to the outward signs of internal commotion which increased upon the countenances of Grace and Sir Charles as the dinner proceeded.

To Cecil, on the contrary, they were plainly and painfully apparent. The conviction that they loved each other was strengthened every moment, and she longed for dinner to be over, and Sir Charles to be gone, that she might have Grace to herself. Surely, Grace could not think of what she was doing! For an engaged woman to flirt with any one, was, to Cecil's high sense of honour, an undignified and disgraceful proceeding: but this had not the silly, simpering characteristic of a flirtation. If she read the signs of their embarrassment aright — and she feared she did—this was a more serious affair.

Ah! that she could have one half-hour

alone with Grace, whilst there was yet time to save her! Knowing Sir Charles as she did, she felt certain that the fact of Grace's engagement would not stand in his way for a moment, were he really and truly in love with her. "If"—there was no "if." She saw it in his burning cheeks, his pleading eyes, his undisguised admiration. And Grace saw it, too—and encouraged it! Yes, she encouraged it. Her eyes, it is true, sank beneath his; but there was no frown on her brow, no anger, no displeasure in her gentle eyes when she raised them again, and again encountered the glance which seemed to fascinate whilst it subdued her.

Cecil almost groaned aloud.

Dame Dorothy was just beginning with "You haven't heard, I daresay, of Grace's luck, Sir Charles?"—when the door opened, and in walked Mr. Painter.

CHAPTER IX.

BILL FLUKE BRINGS THE REV. AMOS ACRE SOME SMUGGLED HANDKERCHIEFS.

HOW was the Rev. Amos Acre to be prevented reiterating his conviction that he had seen Rupert Vicars, in the body, in Dirge Loafer's kitchen? That was the question, and it was one which it took Rupert, Dirge, and Bill Fluke some time to solve. But at length it was solved. Bill Fluke undertook "to bell the cat"—*id est*, to beard the parson.

"Now then, Bill," said Rupert, "you have no time to lose. If Twiggem and the Cuffs are beforehand with you the mischief

will be done; for Mr. Acre will, of course, declare that he *did* see me, and the pursuit will be hotter than ever. Don't forget the Oxford story. Tell him that I will drive him out of the parish as sure as my name is Rupert Vicars, unless he does my bidding."

"Ay, ay, sir; I'll overhaul the gen'leman and start him on the right tack, never fear," replied Bill, as he rolled out of the room on his mission.

The Rev. Amos Acre was sitting in his study, chewing the cud of patience and nursing the fires of wrath. He was, moreover, smoking a villanously bad cigar, the smell of which was at least as offensive as the effluvium from Farmer Danger's boots. But Mr. Acre had no Dame Dorothy at his elbow—he could poison himself with impunity.

It may seem a strange—possibly a fal-

lacious idea, that I am about to propound; but it is one in which I shall live and die—namely, that no gentleman smokes bad tobacco.

Had I accompanied Bill Fluke into Mr. Acre's sanctum—sacred to bad tobacco, and worse theology—I should, the moment the offensive odour from the tobacco-impregnated cabbage-leaf met my indignant nostril, have said—to myself—"That man is a snob."

Mr. Acre took out his watch;—watches do not, like wine, improve by keeping. It is, therefore, no commendation to Mr. Acre's watch to say that it had belonged to his grandfather. Indeed, if the records of the Acre family are to be relied on, it would reflect no credit on anyone or anything to have belonged to the aforesaid gentleman.

Far be it from me to cast a stone at low birth. We cannot all—like Mecænas—

spring "*atavis regibus.*" I, therefore, find no fault with the original possessor of the watch on the score of his having made it; though, had it belonged to me, I certainly should have objected to its size and its erratic movements.

But the old watchmaker's own movements had been as decidedly erratic as his mechanism. He, too, although not born of royal ancestors, delighted, like Mecænas, in kicking up a dust. But the dust of extravagance requires gold-dust to support it; and in his desire to collect the latter, the old watchmaker contrived to have his history written in the Newgate calendar, and his body transferred to Botany Bay.

All this time Mr. Acre has been consulting his watch. It took him quite as long to find out what o'clock it was, as it did you to read the episode about his grand-

father, for he had calculations of a somewhat complicated character to make.

"Let me see," he said, "my watch was one hour and forty-seven minutes slow by the church clock at Shingleton; and Twiggem says that the church clock is nine minutes faster than his watch—London time. Let me see, that makes—what the deuce does it make?" (for shame, Mr. Acre.) "Oh, stop—yes, that's it! Take nine from forty-seven and thirty-eight remains; so my watch is one hour and thirty-eight minutes slow, and I am a quarter past two. The real time, then, must be"—he took pencil and paper and successfully worked out the problem—"must be thirty-five minutes past three o'clock. Well, then, those fellows ought to be back by this time. I wonder whether they have caught that Rupert Vicars? I hope so. I hate him; a great bullying brute! If by

my means he gets put into gaol and stands in a felon's dock, we shall be about quits. I would give five pounds; five! I would give fifty pounds to see that fellow in a convict's dress."

Amos Acre walked up and down his small parlour in a state of moist excitement.

"And only to think," he continued, "only to think that Grace Meadows should have accepted that red-faced, hook-nosed Painter! I hate a man with what is called a Roman nose. I wonder what Grace could see in him to fall in love with; a vulgar, noisy sailor, who smells of tar and bellows at one as if he was hailing the main-top of a ten-decker—if there is such a thing. I can't bear sailors—never could; they are so forward and presuming. Hullo! who's there? Come in! Here they are, at last."

"If you please, sir," said a little old

woman, with a fiery face, "there's a young man as wishes to speak to you."

"Oh, very well; show him in, Mrs. Bridger."

The little old woman did so, and banged the door after her; for Mrs. Bridger's temper was fiery, as well as her face. She was enjoying her after-dinner nap when "the young man" woke her up; a circumstance of itself very trying. And then Mr. Acre had spoken quickly, not to say sharply —the natural effect of the bad temper *he* was in—and, as Mrs. Bridger thought, not over civilly.

"'Show him in, show him in,'—as if he was speaking to a dog," she muttered. "He couldn't say 'If you please, Mrs. Bridger.' Oh no! That would be too much condescension, o' course."

Mr. Acre certainly had not a pleasant manner. He was not popular with any class.

A heavy step was heard in the passage. Mr. Acre's small eyes sparkled, much as a ferret's would sparkle upon hearing a rabbit burrowing under ground. Not that he expected to see the rabbit that he was after enter the room; but he did expect to hear of his capture. He felt sure he was taken, and he rubbed his hands together gleefully at the pleasant thought.

A modest knock was answered by a prompt and ready "Come in." The door opened, and a square-built, jolly-looking young man, in a sailor's rough pea-coat and a tarpaulin hat, entered the room.

He first shut and locked the door, then took off his hat; and looking Mr. Acre steadily in the face, said, "Beg your pardon, sir, but I want a word wi' you in private, if *you* please."

The Rev. Amos Acre had not strong nerves, as I believe I have already stated.

He, therefore, became alarmed at the suspicious proceedings of the stranger and his naturally pale face became a shade paler; and again the perspiration—this time of a cold character—stood on his forehead.

"Who—who are you?—and—what—what do you want?" he stammered forth.

"Well, it don't much matter who I am, thof I'm not ashamed o' my name; but what I want is very soon told."

Bill Fluke spoke civilly and quietly, out of consideration for the state of alarm the reverend gentleman was in, for he really pitied whilst he despised him.

Bill's gentleness, or more properly speaking, his moderation, imparted a species of false courage to Mr. Acre, and he began to bluster.

"I don't care who you are or what you want," he said, in a loud tone, "but I con-

sider your coming in here and locking the door of my study a great piece of impertinence. Undo the door this moment or I shall ring the bell and order the people to turn you out of the house."

Mr. Acre had worked himself up to a state of indignant defiance; he really, at the time, considered himself capable of a brave action, accordingly he stretched out his hand to the bell-rope.

In an instant all the suavity of Bill's manner disappeared. Presenting a pistol at the head of the astonished clergyman, he said, in a stern voice, "Drop your hand, sir."

Mr. Acre's arm fell mechanically to his side.

"Now, sir, you sit down," was the next command, the pistol being still pointed at his head.

Scarcely had the words left Bill's mouth

when the Rev. Amos was seated. Bill Fluke took a step towards him.

"Oh, don't murder me!" cried the terrified man; "what do you want?—Money! I have none—that is very little—but I will give you all I have, I will indeed——"

"Pooh!" said Bill, lowering his pistol; "I don't want your money, an' I'm not a going to hurt you, that is if you does as I tells you."

Mr. Acre promised anything if only the ferocious Bill would spare his life.

"All right, sir: now then to bizness. You saw Mister Rupert Vicars in Dirge Loafer's cottage, and you sent the beaks after him——"

"I—I—didn't exactly send them,—I thought it my duty to—to——"

"Don't waste time in telling lies, sir—we knows you sent 'em; but 'tain't for that as I'm here. Well, they has searched Loafer's

house, but they didn't find what they wanted. "Now, when they come 'ere, as come they will to tell you o' their bad luck and to ask you if you be sure as 'twas Mister Rupert as you see in Loafer's kitchen, you must say that you *are not* sure; that you has been a thinkin' it over, an' has come to the conclusion that it was Tim Trimmer the blacksmith as you see, an' not Mister Rupert: do you understand what I say, sir?"

"Yes, yes; but I swore that I saw Rupert Vicars, and how can I say now that I did *not* see him?"

"You swore to the best of your recollection, but now—you are satisfied as you was wrong, an' you feel sure as 'twas Tim Trimmer as you see. That is what you has to say, sir, an' what you'd best say, take my word for it."

Bill Fluke accompanied this recommenda-

tion with a fierce flash of his eyes and a significant nod.

"I will—I will indeed do as you tell me," gasped out the frightened Amos, whose only thought at that moment was to get rid of his unwelcome visitor at any cost.

Bill Fluke suspected as much. "Now, Mr. Acre," he said, "as soon as me an' my pistol is gone, it's likely your courage will come back a bit, an' mayhap you'll forget what you've to say to the constables, by which means you'd get yourself into a precious mess; but I've got a message from Mister Rupert to you which will likely keep you straight."

Bill drew a slip of paper from his pocket and presented it to Mr. Acre, who read as follows:—

"Amos Acre,—Remember the park palings at Blenheim, what happened there, and

what led to it: do my bidding now, or the same scene shall be re-enacted, and the cause made public, as sure as my name is RUPERT VICARS."

The Rev. Amos trembled as he read those few lines; well did he remember the circumstances alluded to; but even in the midst of his fear, a happy thought, redolent of revenge, occurred to him. What if he could keep that paper? in that case he might safely promise anything.

"Well, sir," said Bill, thinking Mr. Acre had pondered long enough over the note which he had abstractedly crumpled up into the hollow of his hand. "Well, sir, what answer am I to give Mister Rupert?"

"Tell him that I will do as he bids me; I have no wish to injure him, why should I? we were friends once, and it is not my fault that we are so no longer." He slid the paper

into his pocket, unperceived as he imagined, but he was mistaken.

"I'm glad you've so decided, sir, it's best for all parties; *that* you may rely on, and now I'll be off; but first just 'and me back that paper as you've put into your pocket, if you please."

"Paper! what paper?" said the Rev. Amos with admirably feigned astonishment.

"The note I brought you from Mister Rupert: come, sir, out with it, it's time I was gone."

Amos here hesitated, fancying that he heard voices outside. It might be the constables; if so, help was at hand.

Bill Fluke had also heard voices, and had come to the same conclusion. "Are you going to give me that paper, or must I take it, sir?" he asked, in a quick, fierce tone, at the same time showing the butt-end of his pistol.

Footsteps as well as voices were now distinctly discernible in the passage. Although in mortal dread Amos Acre mustered up sufficient courage to brave the wrath of this dreadful man. Surely he dare not murder me, and people actually at the door! "No, I will not give——"

It was all he uttered: his throat was clutched as if in a vice, his eyes seemed starting from his head, and his ashen face became purple. Bill thrust his disengaged hand into Mr. Acre's pocket, drew forth the note and flung it into the fire. He then let go his fearful grip, and Amos Acre sank back gasping and struggling for breath.

At this moment there was a knock at the door. Bill placed a small parcel on the table, and whispered hurriedly, but with terrible distinctness, "I come to bring you these handkerchers, as you ordered, *remember!* and the door was locked be-

cause we didn't want no witnesses to our bargain; *if so be you plays ether Mister Rupert or me false—you may make your will.*" So saying, Bill unlocked and opened the door, shouldered his way past two men in the dark passage, and left the house.

The men stared after him but said nothing; they had not recognised him. Upon entering Mr. Acre's room they found that gentleman extremely red in the face, standing before the glass tying his neckcloth as well as his trembling hands would permit.

"Sarvant, sir," said Bob Cuff, wondering more than ever who it was that had pushed by them so rudely; and why Mr. Acre's face was in such a flame. "Sarvant, sir, me an' Tom 'ere 'as come by Mister Twiggem's orders to say as we 'as sarched Dirge Loafer's 'ouse from top to bottom an' ain't found 'im as we wanted; an' Mr. Twiggem says—says 'e—be you sartin sure as you

see Rupert Vicars in Dirge's kitchen—that's what 'e wants to know; because ef you bant cocksure it were Rupert Vicars as you see, Mister Twiggem wunt stay 'ere no longer, 'e says."

"Why wont Twig-ig-iggem sta-ay? I have got such a cough I can scarcely s-spe-speak," replied Mr. Acre, whose throat had by no means recovered the pressure from without to which it had so lately and so violently been subjected; besides he wished to gain time to collect his ideas.

But Bob returned to the charge; he would have an answer, "yes" or "no."

"Twiggem says as 'e'll goo, it ain't no matter why or when; but ef so be 'e gooz, the reward gooz with 'im—onless you'll take your apple-david as 'twas Rupert Vicars you see in Loafer's kitchen; ef you will do that, Mr. *H*acre, Twiggem 'll 'ave another turn arter Vicars; but ef you

wunt, why then 'e'll cut away an' look for 'im some'rs else, that's 'ow 'tis. But sure*ly*, Mr. *H*acre, you *be* sartin sure you see Vicars!—sure*ly* you be?"

Amos hummed and hawed and cleared his throat half a dozen times before answering. It was gall and wormwood to him to be obliged to contradict his former assertion. Not that he cared twopence about the contradiction, but he cared many twopences (not to say pounds) about letting Rupert Vicars escape. However, he had no alternative. To disobey the commands he had received was not to be thought of. His windpipe throbbed yet with the squeeze it had lately undergone. He would not trust himself within arm's length of that ruffian again, no! not for untold wealth; and as for Rupert Vicars! the very name made his flesh creep! No, he had no alternative.

"Mr. Cuff," he said—his speech being in-

terrupted by almost incessant coughing—"Mr. Cuff, I have thought over my former assertion regarding Rupert Vicars, and although I cannot positively affirm that I did *not* see him, yet, in the face of your failure, I am not prepared to say that I *did*. It is quite possible that I may have been mistaken in the first instance. I had but a rapid glance into the kitchen, and I repeat that I may have been mistaken—indeed, I rather think I was; I really am extremely sorry for having given you and your brother, and that indefatigable officer Mr. Twiggem, so much unnecessary trouble, but I did it for the best."

Here Mr. Acre was brought to a standstill by a violent fit of coughing.

"Did it for the best!" growled Bob, not in the least regarding the reverend gentleman's symptoms of distress, but very much regarding the vanishing view of the reward which Mr. Acre's explanation presented to

him. "Did it for the best! what's the use o' sayin' one thing one time, and another t'other? that ain't doin' business in no form, that ain't."

The Reverend Amos again explained, and again expressed his sorrow at having misled his friends the constables. But it is likely that his protestations would still have been taken in bad part, if not entirely disbelieved (for the Cuffs were furious at the idea of losing the reward, and talked of fetching Mr. Twiggem to see what he could make of it), had not Mr. Acre, who wisely dreaded the presence of the more acute Twiggem, placed a golden sovereign in the hands of each of the brothers, observing in a confidental tone, "I owe you this for having, though unintentionally, thrown you on a wrong scent, and for giving you so much extra trouble. But—let Twiggem go," (he lowered his voice to a whisper); "I don't believe that either Rupert Vicars or

Colonel Dimdale is far off; depend upon it you have as good a chance of finding them in this neighbourhood as Twiggem has of finding them elsewhere; let him go, I say; why should you two share the reward with a stranger? You are the parish constables, and, if those you want are in this parish, you have the best right to the reward, besides you have worked twice as hard for it as he has."

So badly did Amos Acre act the part assigned him, that even Tom Cuff suspected, and very nearly discovered, the fraud he sought to impose upon them.

"Well, now!" cried that worthy, slapping the table with his open palm—"ef I don't b'lieve as you see Vicars in Dirge Loafer's kitchen arter all! else what makes you say as 'e's in the neighb'rood—'ow's that, Mister *H*acre? Come now! you see 'im in Dirge's kitchen, I do b'lieve."

"No, no, I did not indeed—you are quite mistaken, I assure you," exclaimed Amos in so hurried and alarmed a tone that anyone, except the two blockheads to whom he was speaking, would instantly have suspected him of double dealing. It was, indeed, lucky for Mr. Acre that Twiggem was not then present.

"Well, but you see some one, sir," persisted Tom Cuff; "who was it, ef 'twant Vicars?"

"Why, I have been thinking, my good friend—I have been thinking of that very thing—who was it? as you say; and my belief is, indeed I am almost positive, that the person I saw and took for Rupert Vicars, was—was in reality Tim Trimmer, the blacksmith."

The Handcuffs nodded approval of this solution; it tallied with their past experience in Loafer's kitchen. They were also well

pleased with their sovereign apiece, and still better pleased at the idea of getting rid of the interloper, Twiggem, and dividing the reward without his assistance.

"We'll tell Mr. Twiggem what you say, sir," said Robert Cuff, looking, as he thought, extremely knowing—"and when 'e's gone, we'll take the liberty o' callin' on your honour again; may be you'll 'ave some more information to give us—who knows?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Acre, blinking the latter supposition; "tell Mr. Twiggem what I have said, and add that I am very sorry to have made such a mistake; very sorry, indeed."

"If I may make so bold," said Tom Cuff, "I'd like to know who that young man were as pushed by us in the passage? Not as it sinifies, ef so be you wishes to keep it dark, sir; on'y the door were locked, an' I

thought pre'aps if you an' 'e was a talkin' over this 'ere business o' Vicars, why we might as well know what 'twere, sir. But it ain't no matter; not a bit on it."

"What young man?" said Amos; adding immediately, "Oh, I remember——Well, to say the truth, I had rather not tell you what that man's business was with me. Yet, I don't know, either; you would not take advantage of it to injure me?"

"Oh, no; they would not do that." They were wild to know this great secret. Something about Rupert Vicars, they were sure. Perhaps, after all, Mr. Acre *did* know where he was!

"Well, the fact is," continued Amos, taking up the parcel Bill Fluke had left, "the man brought me a few silk handkerchiefs, that had not been bought either at Shingleton or Dummer—you understand—so he thought it safest to lock the door

whilst we arranged our bargain. You wont say a word about this, now, though you *are* constables."

No mountain ever brought forth so small a mouse, in the estimation, that is, of the Messieurs Cuff. What did they care about smuggled silk handkerchiefs? They said as much, and took their departure; whilst Amos Acre lit another tobacconized cabbage-leaf; and ruminated over the dangers he believed he had escaped, and the lies he knew he had told.

CHAPTER X.

SHOWING THAT "TWO STRINGS TO ONE'S BOW" MAY BE INCONVENIENT.

THIRTY years ago we used to have what we now call "old-fashioned winters," and "old-fashioned summers." A month or six weeks of uninterrupted frost was not an uncommon occurrence in those days. The summers, too, were dry and sultry; weeks of drought, till the hard earth gaped and cracked, swallowing up whole broods of young partridges. So, at least, I used to be told by our trusty keeper, when the coveys were few and far between.

This story opened with a fearful snow-

storm, followed by a sharp frost and a clear sky.

The snow which fell on that tempestuous night still lay on the ground. The frost which followed it still maintained its iron grasp upon the earth. Not a flake of snow, not a drop of rain had interfered to weaken its power or to mitigate its severity; *ergo*, its severity was increased: an uninterrupted succession of cold days and colder nights had thoroughly iced the atmosphere. Men buttoned close and walked quick. The cattle loomed large as bisons, and the sheep looked black and bulky amongst the snow and turnips. Mr. Danger's robin had, apparently, turned his feathers inside out, so rough and untidy did he appear as he sat puffed up to the size of a duck on his old post—the broken laurel-branch. How tame he is, too; and well he may be, for he is now petted instead of pelted. Bread-crumbs on the window-sill

and bread-crumbs on the gravel-walk proclaim the fact.

The first straight, sharp marks of the broom which swept the snow from the walk are still there, frozen into the ground. No signs of a change—no sign of "giving." It seemed as though the normal state of nature were frost and snow.

Such being the state of the weather, you will not be surprised if I tell you that Mr. Painter's naturally rubicund complexion had a purplish tinge in it, the reverse of becoming, when he presented himself at the door of the little parlour at Hollow-hill. This purplish tinge was strongest where, for picturesque effect, it ought to have been weakest—namely, in his nose. Moreover, his eyes looked red and watery, and his features pinched by the severe cold.

An unattractive picture, it must be confessed; especially when contrasted with the

glowing countenance of the handsome Baronet. That this comparison occurred to Grace, we may be very sure.

Mr. Painter stood a few seconds at the door. A look of surprise was on his face, which, however, was speedily changed to one of pleasure.

"What, Sir Charles! I declare I scarcely knew you at first!" he exclaimed, as he hastily crossed the room and shook the young man warmly by the hand.

The greeting was as cordially returned, for Sir Charles really liked "Old Painter," as he called him, and for the moment the fact of his being the accepted lover of Grace Meadows was forgotten. But the disagreeable truth was speedily brought back to his recollection by Dame Dorothy.

"I was just about to tell Sir Charles," she said, "that you and Grace had agreed to take one another for better or for worse,

when you opened the door, Mr. Painter; and now you must ask Sir Charles yourself for his congratulations, which I'm sure he'll be pleased enough to give. You was always fond of Grace, sir, I know,"—this to Sir Charles—"and will be glad to hear of her happy prospecs."

"Indeed I am—quite so—very much pleased—very glad indeed—wish you joy, Painter—both of you," stammered forth the embarrassed Baronet.

His very evident confusion was, however, put down to the score of his youth and his bashfulness, and therefore excited no surprise.

Mr. Painter was naturally the most unsuspicious of mortals; moreover, he was desperately in love; and being in the seventh heaven of bliss, or on the highest pinnacle of folly, he looked forth over a lovely landscape, all truth and beauty.

Alas! we know, or at least suspect, that he was revelling in a fool's paradise; but he, poor man, suspected nothing of the sort; why should he? And thus it came to pass, that when Grace turned away her blushing face from his loving eyes and answered his numerous queries sometimes shortly, sometimes not at all, he marvelled at her change of manner, but attributed no blame to her. The fault must be his own; what had he done? He had been late for dinner, perhaps that was it. Ah! he would soon put that right.

Mr. Painter being rebuffed by his lady-love, did not sulk, for which I think he deserved great credit, but he directed his conversation and attentions elsewhere. "I have brought you a couple of mallards, Mrs. Danger, which I shot on my way here," he said; adding, "I ought to have had a duck as well. I hit her hard and thought

she was down, but she recovered herself and got away."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Painter," quoth the dame; "you keep us well supplied with wildfowl, as is right you should, seeing as you are going to steal our pretty tame duck away from us, you know."

It was not often that Dame Dorothy condescended to commonplace jokes, and no sooner had the above pitiful jest passed her lips than a flush of shame on her comely countenance proclaimed her consciousness of the atrocity she had committed. She therefore received in meekness of spirit the humiliating applause of Mr. Painter, who, in his present frame of mind, would, as a matter of course, have praised the lowest witticism on record from the lips of anyone connected with Grace.

But the dame's equanimity could not withstand the loud "Haw, haw, haw!" of

the jovial farmer, who exclaimed, "Well done, dame! that's a good un, that is—steal our pretty tame duck, eh, Grace! What do ye say to that?"

"Mercy on us! Richard Danger," cried his wife, "whatever are you shouting like that for? We ain't any of us deaf, I hope."

But Richard Danger was not to be put down. The humming ale and the old crusted port in which he had toasted Sir Charles's return and his niece's engagement (the latter having become a daily toast with the good man), had got into his heart, if not into his head, and had diffused a genial warmth through his entire system. He felt as happy and independent as a king—an extremely bad simile, but it is Mr. Danger's own—and so he laughed louder than before, heedless of Dame Dorothy's rebuke, which in good truth the worthy man put down to the score of modesty on

her part as not liking to have her "good things" so publicly applauded. "Haw, haw, haw!" he laughed again, "that was a good un; I'll back my missis against the whole parish for smartness—ay, or I might say the county!"

Dame Dorothy saw, by the heightened colour in her good man's face, that, at present, remonstrance would only make matters worse, so she held her peace, and smiling grimly, suffered in silence.

Ah, wise Dame Dorothy! few there be (even in this advanced age) who have acquired the power—have learned the lesson of "holding their peace" at the proper time!

Since the period in which Dame Dorothy flourished we have indeed learned "to turn on the steam" to some purpose, witness our railroads, our ocean steamers, and our steam ploughs; but assuredly we have yet

to learn when "to turn the steam off." Therefore, all honour to thee, thou prudent and wise matron, who, although living in comparative darkness, didst, nevertheless, catch a ray of light and profit by it!

Would that the Dame Dorothys of this present brilliant epoch—whose charming conversation and deep learning equally delight and instruct us—might also bear in mind that there is a time for all things—a time to speak and a time to be silent.

Again did the jovial farmer, beaming with beer and glowing with good humour, return to the charge. "You haven't brought home a tame duck with you, Sir Charles," he said, with a cunning wink at Grace, because she happened to be next to him.

"I!—a tame duck! oh, I see! no, no; nothing of the sort!" replied the Baronet, fixing his eyes on Grace, who felt ready to

sink under the table; so full of meaning, to her at least, were those deep, earnest eyes.

"Well, I'm glad of that," said the farmer. "You have a right to choose where you like, o' course, sir, but I should ha' been sorry if you had brought a furrin lady home with you, that I should."

"Oh! no fear of that," said Sir Charles, making an indifferent attempt at an easy laugh, and adding, "I don't mean to go out of England for a wife; but there is time enough yet, you know."

"We will give you Ireland in, Sir Charles," said Cecil, smiling pleasantly. "As you are an Irishman, an Irish lady would probably suit you best; don't you think so?"

"Well, I don't know—no, I don't think she would," he replied, rather doggedly.

At length Sir Charles rose to depart. "I must really be off now," he said, "for I

promised to drive my mother out in the pony-carriage at two o'clock, and I see that it is half-past one by the old cuckoo. Does the cuckoo go as well as ever, Mrs. Danger?"

"Oh, yes, Sir Charles, quite as well; but before you go you must taste my gooseberry wine—you must indeed. Your mother, Lady Jane, says as she shouldn't know it from champagne; and indeed, Mr. Painter said the same thing only the other day, when we drank 'good-luck' to the betrothed, as I mean you to do now, Sir Charles."

"Indeed, Mrs. Danger," cried the Baronet, in alarm, "you must excuse me; I really cannot stay. I—I——"

"Oh, I'll not take an excuse; you *must* drink health and happiness to Grace and her lover, both of them old friends of yours, Sir Charles; and I'm sure they'd be quite hurt if you was to disappoint them. And

here's Kattern with the glasses; and here's a bottle of real gooseberry wine" (reaching one down from the top of a lofty bureau) "as the county can't match, I don't care where the other is."

Sir Charles's protestations and excuses were of no avail; he was regularly in for it. *Nolens volens* he must drink "health, happiness, good-luck, and all the rest of it," to a union the very thought of which nearly drove him wild.

As he raised the glass to his lips, his rage and vexation became so great that he had serious thoughts of dashing it, wine and all, into Mr. Painter's face, as he stood smirking and smiling exactly opposite to him; and who knows but he might have done so, had not an imploring look from Grace brought him to his senses, sufficiently so at least to enable him to pass the ordeal without any glaring misconduct!

"Here's health and happiness to you, Grace," he said in a hurried, nervous tone, "and the same to you," nodding to Mr. Painter; "but not with *her*," he muttered, as he gulped down the wine, without once considering its surpassing merits, although he declared to Dame Dorothy that he too should not have known it from champagne; he might have said with equal truth, "or from port."

Sir Charles was gone, but there was no getting a word alone with Grace; Mr. Painter, as a matter of course, monopolized her. He asked her to walk with him, and as she left the room to put on her hat, Cecil would have followed her, but a question from Mr. Painter prevented her, and the opportunity was lost. At bed-time, indeed, she should have Grace all to herself, and till then she must brood over her discovery and fret and fume herself into a fever in the

vain endeavour to discover a clue whereby to guide Grace out of the labyrinth in which she feared her sister was involved.

The surprise and delight of seeing "dear Charley" (she could not think of him as "Sir Charles") had quite upset the equilibrium of Grace's mind, which his loving looks had by no means tended to restore; but when he was gone and she found herself alone with her good, kind, unsuspicious, matter-of-fact lover, a speedy reaction took place. To say the truth, she felt somewhat ashamed of her rude and ungracious reception of Mr. Painter's attentions, and she was silent and tearful during their walk.

In vain did Mr. Painter urge her to tell him the cause of her low spirits, equally vain were his efforts to cheer and enliven her; she *would* be miserable.

"Early days these," soliloquized Mr. Painter, as he walked by the side of his

fiancée, "early days for troubles to begin, but the 'course of true love never did run smooth,' they say; and I have no right to expect mine to be an exception to the general rule." Nevertheless, he was annoyed; who would not have been?

"Dearest Grace," he said on their return to the farm-house, "your behaviour towards me to-day is so very different from what it ever was before, that I must beg of you to explain the cause of the change. Why were you so unkind, so uncourteous, I may say, at dinner? and why are you so silent and unhappy now? No answer, Grace!"

No, there was no answer, but she shook her head, and the tears fell faster than before.

"Then, good night, Grace," he said, very sorrowfully, holding out his hand.

She took it in silence.

The touch of the dear little hand that he loved so well drove every feeling of annoy-

ance from his breast. "I cannot leave you in anger, dearest," he whispered, drawing her closer to him, "but your altered behaviour makes me so wretched that I could not stay without its being evident to all that something unpleasant had occurred between us. Tell them that I have business to attend to, which is true, and I will come to-morrow, when my own darling Grace will, I am sure, explain everything; I will not teaze her any more now."

He drew her still closer to him, and kissed her pale, cold cheek, and white, trembling lips.

There was no response—and no effort to repel. A slight shudder and a look of doubtful import, in which fear seemed to predominate, were all the answer he received.

He sighed and released her. "Good night, once more, dearest," he said.

"Good night," she replied in a low voice, her eyes full of tears. And so they parted.

Philip Painter, like St. Patrick, was a gentleman and born of "dacent people?—but people of little social position and of no political importance. Therefore Philip Painter, although he had seen much hard service and borne himself gallantly in many a bloody fight, was still only "Lieutenant, R.N." In those days, "a ship" was the reward of aristocratic service. A coast-guard's station was good enough for the son of a Somersetshire clergyman.

What a pleasing contrast to that age of dark injustice does our own pure time present! *Merit*, and merit alone, is now recognised as the only claim for promotion and decoration. You never hear now-a-days of an incompetent lordling, who, having lost the army entrusted to his care, is rewarded by a high command, and decorated with medals. No, no, the days of the Fitzswaggers, and Fitzmuddles are over;

so hold up your heads, ye sons of Dob and sons of Hob! Uprise ye, then, my merry, merry men—this is *your* opening day.

Philip Painter had, at one time, been the life of the midshipman's mess, and the best dancer in the squadron. At Malta—at Gibraltar—at Lisbon he had danced and conquered, for the signoras and signoritas troubled themselves neither about pedigree nor political influence.

But when, after many futile attempts to obtain promotion and a ship, he found himself shelved as a revenue officer, he became a changed man; and, as a rule, shunned society, feeling that he ought to occupy a higher position in it than that which was awarded him.

The Dangers, with whom he associated, invariably treated him with consideration and respect, for they perceived that he was a gentleman. It was at Hollowhill that he

first saw Grace, then a mere child; but now the child had grown into a very lovely woman, whose influence had drawn him out of his misanthropic habits, whose companionship had rubbed off some of the rust which years of almost total absence from the society of ladies had collected. Still, Philip Painter, the revenue officer, was not the good looking lady's man that Philip Painter the middy had been, some twenty years before.

When Grace entered the parlour, she was assailed with "Where is Mr. Painter?" and her quiet "Gone home, he has business to attend to," seemed to satisfy all present, Cecil excepted, who perceived in a moment that something was wrong.

At length it was bed-time, and the sisters were alone.

"Grace," said Cecil, almost before their door was closed, "how much did you tell Mr. Painter?"

Grace started and coloured violently. "How much?—how much of what?"

"How much of what I saw at dinner; you know well what I mean."

For a few moments there was no reply. Grace then said gently and sadly, "I told him nothing."

"Then why did he not come in with you?"

"Because he said that I had made him unhappy; and he could not bear to come in—I believe."

"And why have you made him unhappy, Grace?—oh, Grace! why——"

Cecil spoke quickly and angrily.

Her sister threw herself on the bed and burst into tears. Cecil's first thought was to soothe her grief, but she refrained. "It will do her good," she muttered, and so she remained for fully twenty minutes without saying a word; during which time Grace

cried piteously, hoping and expecting every moment that Cecil would ask what was amiss. But she did nothing of the sort, she simply sat and watched her sister in silence. And yet she was not the cruel, hard-hearted woman you think her. Had she followed her own inclinations she would have thrown herself by Grace's side and kissed the tears away as they fell, for she dearly loved her sister; but she had a duty to perform, which tenderness on her part would have rendered her incapable of. She must not give way to her feelings; her very love for Grace nerved her to act a seemingly ungracious part.

At length Grace sobbed out, "Cecil, how unkind you are! I am so miserable!"

Cecil sat down by her side and kissed her hot, wet cheek; she could not resist that plaintive appeal. "I am not unkind, dearest Grace," she said, "but I am so hurt, so vexed, so disappointed in you. I had

always believed you to be the most truthful, the most open-hearted of human beings—I fancied I knew your every thought; and now to find that you have been deceiving me for—I know not how long—but certainly for many months past! Why did you never tell me that you loved Charley Dimdale? and, oh, Grace! above all, why did you accept Mr. Painter, when you knew that you loved another?"

"I did not—indeed, indeed, Cecil, I did not know it—till—till to-day——"

Cecil looked up in astonishment. It seemed as though Grace were speaking the truth; indeed, she always spoke the truth, she never was guilty of the slightest prevarication, much less of telling a direct falsehood; and yet her present avowal appeared simply absurd.

"You don't mean to tell me seriously, Grace, that you fell in love with Charley to-day for the first time?" she asked.

"I don't know—I believe so—not exactly perhaps, but I did not know it before. I am telling the truth, Cecil, indeed, I am; but I scarcely know how to tell it."

Cecil saw her distress and nervousness; the icy barrier behind which she had thought to conceal her warm affections melted away, and a flood of tenderness poured forth. She threw her arms round Grace's neck. "My own, my darling sister," she cried, "tell me all—every—everything—conceal nothing—shelter no one—let me know the whole truth."

Grace clung to her sister with child-like tenacity. "I *will* tell you all," she whispered; "but you cannot help me—I am so miserable—I shall never, never be happy again, and it is all my own fault."

END OF VOL. II.

